

BETHEL HILL UNITED METHODIST CHURCH
SAFE SANCTUARIES POLICY
June 2016

In accord with the Safe Sanctuaries, Reducing the Risk of Abuse in the Church, policy for the Conference, Districts, and Local Churches of the Eastern Pennsylvania Conference, issued May 2015, the policy of Bethel Hill United Methodist Church is that ministry of the gospel of Jesus Christ be pursued in a reasonable balance with caution against the abuse risks confronting our children, youth and adults. This congregation shall be completely intolerant of the sin of abuse perpetrated against its children and youth. In all our ministries with children, youth, and vulnerable adults, Bethel Hill United Methodist Church is committed to demonstrating the love of Jesus Christ so that each individual will be “surrounded by steadfast love, established in the faith and confirmed and strengthened in the way that leads to eternal life”. (The Book of Worship, Baptismal Covenant, Congregational Pledge II)

PREAMBLE

God has called us to make our ministries safe, protecting our children from abuse and exploitation. God has also called us to create communities of faith where children can be safe and grow strong.

Jesus taught “Whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me,” (Mark 9:37 NRSV) and “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 NRSV)

The Social Principles of The United Methodist Church state “...children must be protected from economic, physical, and sexual exploitation and abuse.” (Par. 162(D) 2012 Book of Discipline)

At each child’s baptism, we affirm our responsibility to their safety by our congregational response, pledging:

“With God’s help, we will so order our lives after the example of Christ that this child, surrounded by steadfast love, may be established in the faith, and confirmed and strengthened in the way that leads to life eternal.” (The Book of Worship, Baptismal Covenant, Congregational Pledge II)

Building on these foundations, we recognize that our faith calls us to offer hospitality and protection to all children, as well as those who are committed to ministering to them as volunteers and employees. Bethel Hill United Methodist Church has established this policy to 1) prevent such abuse from happening in our churches; 2) make our churches places where children can feel safer in disclosing abuse; and 3) protect the loyal volunteers and employees that minister to our children.

This policy is meant to comply the Eastern Pennsylvania Conference mandate that every church in the conference adopt a Safe Sanctuaries policy that conforms to the standards set forth in the conference policy.

Notwithstanding anything contained in this policy, it is the responsibility of the church to ensure that it is in compliance with all aspects of the Pennsylvania Child Protective Services Law (63 PA. C.S.A. 6301). In the event that the law conflicts with this policy, the law shall control.

DEFINITIONS:

“Child” – any person who has not reached his/her eighteenth birthday.

“Child Abuse” – As defined by the laws of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania. The conference Safe Sanctuaries Committee shall ensure that current definitions of child abuse are available on the conference website.

“Direct contact with children” – The care, supervision, guidance or control of children or routine interaction with children.

“Mandated Reporters” - The following adults are required to make a report of suspected child abuse, if the person has reasonable cause to suspect that a child is a victim of child abuse: (1) A clergyman, priest, rabbi, minister, Christian Science practitioner, religious healer or spiritual leader of any regularly established church or other religious organization. (2) An individual paid or unpaid, who, on the basis of the individual's role as an integral part of a regularly scheduled program, activity or service, accepts responsibility for a child. (3) An individual supervised or managed by a person listed above.

“Person responsible for the child’s welfare” – a person who provides permanent or temporary care, supervision, mental health diagnosis or treatment, training or control of a child in lieu of parental care, supervision and control. The term includes any such person who has direct or regular contact with a child through any program, activity or service sponsored by a school, for-profit organization or religious or other not-for-profit organization.

SCREENING AND SELECTION OF STAFF AND VOLUNTEERS:

Careful screening is an effective way to help protect children. It is an essential step in selecting the most reliable, committed and experienced staff and volunteers for every program that involves children.

Screening Standards: All applicants for employment in which that applicant shall have direct contact with children shall complete the following prior to start of service:

1) Written Application – All prospective workers with children shall complete a written application that shall include at least the following information:

- a. Name
- b. Address
- c. Phone Number
- d. Work/Volunteer History
- e. Experience and skills related to the position
- f. Two (2) personal, non-related references.

2) Background Checks –

a. Employees - The following background checks shall be obtained for all prospective employees 14 years of age or older who will be responsible for the welfare of a child or have direct contact with children:

i. Pennsylvania State Police Criminal Report – A report of criminal history record information from the Pennsylvania State Police or a statement from the Pennsylvania State Police that the State Police central repository contains no information related to that person. A new State Police Criminal report must be obtained every 36 months.

ii. Pennsylvania Child Abuse History Clearance – A certification from the Department of Public Welfare that reports whether the applicant is named in the Statewide database as the alleged perpetrator in a pending child abuse investigation or identified as the perpetrator in a founded report or an indicated report. A new child abuse clearance report must be obtained every 36 months.

iii. FBI Report – a report of federal criminal history record information. The applicant shall submit a full set of fingerprints to the Pennsylvania State Police for the purpose of a record check. A new FBI report must be obtained every 36 months.

b. The applicant shall produce the original documents required in i., ii., and iii., and the church shall make copies, signed and dated by the person receiving them. All written records shall be confidential and kept in a locked file cabinet of the church office. Files shall be maintained for 3 years after service ends.

c. Clearances for employees obtained prior to 12/31/2014 shall be valid for 36 months from date of issuance.

d. Clearances for volunteers obtained prior to 7/1/2015 shall be valid for 36 months from date of issuance.

e. Grounds for denying employment - Based on the results of the background checks obtained from sections i, ii, and iii, the following shall be grounds for denying employment or volunteer service. Grounds for denying employment are not limited to this list only:

i. No applicant may be hired or used in volunteer service who is named in the statewide database as the perpetrator of a founded report of child abuse committed within the previous five (5) years.

ii. No applicant may be hired or used in volunteer service if the applicant's criminal history record information indicates the applicant has been convicted of one or more of the offenses as found in the PA Child Protective Services Law, Title 23 Pa. C.S.A. 6344(C). The conference Safe Sanctuaries Committee shall ensure that the current list of offenses is posted on the conference website.

f. Anyone working with children/youth on a regular basis, prior to screening, must be active in our church for at least 6 months. Applicants may be hired on a provisional basis for a single period not to exceed 30 days or, for out-of-state applicants, 90 days, if all of the following conditions are met:

i. The applicant has applied for the required background checks and the applicant provides a copy of the appropriate completed request forms.

ii. The administrator responsible for employment decisions has no knowledge of information pertaining to the applicant which would disqualify them from employment pursuant to the grounds for denying employment listed above.

iii. The applicant swears or affirms in writing that he or she is not disqualified from employment pursuant to the grounds for denying employment listed above.

iv. If the information obtained in the background checks reveals that the applicant is disqualified from employment, the applicant shall be immediately dismissed.

v. The applicant will not be permitted to work alone with children, and the applicant will work in the immediate vicinity of a permanent employee or volunteer who has completed the screening process.

g. Volunteers - All volunteers who will have direct contact with children are required to produce the same documents and meet all other requirements as employees with the following exception:

i. The volunteer applicant is not required to produce an FBI Report if all of the following apply:

1. The position is unpaid.

2. The prospective volunteer has been a resident of Pennsylvania during the entirety of the previous ten years.

3. The prospective volunteer swears or affirms in writing that they have not been convicted of an offense in another state or territory, District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, or foreign nation similar to those Pennsylvania offenses that cause disqualification.

4. If a volunteer does not meet the above conditions and is required to produce an FBI report, the requirement for new FBI reports every 36 months is waived if the volunteer resides in Pennsylvania continuously after obtaining the initial report.

3) Written notice of new arrest, conviction or substantiated child abuse – All employees and volunteers shall provide written notice to the administrator or designated person within 72 hours of the following:

- a. Being arrested for or convicted of an offense that would be grounds for denial of employment or volunteer service.
- b. Being named as a perpetrator in a founded or indicated report.

If the person responsible for employment decisions or the administrator of a program has reason to believe that either a. or b. above is true, and has not received written notification from the employee or volunteer, they shall immediately require the individual to provide new clearances. Pennsylvania law requires that clearances required for this purpose be paid for by the church.

4) References – at least two references from persons not related to the applicant shall be obtained and contacted for all new applicants for employment or volunteer service

5) Relationship with Church – All prospective volunteer workers with children shall 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.

6) Records – All written records shall be confidential and shall be kept in a a locked file cabinet of the church office with access restricted to those with need to know. All files shall be maintained for three (3) years after service ends.

TRAINING:

All persons who have direct contact with children shall participate in orientation training and then an annual review.

The orientation shall include an explanation of the Safe Sanctuaries program including:

- 1) The need for Safe Sanctuaries policies and procedures
- 2) Supervision requirements
- 3) Appropriate discipline practices
- 4) Recognizing signs of child abuse
- 5) The role and responsibilities of the mandated reporter
- 6) Reporting procedures
- 7) Employee / volunteer roles and responsibilities

The initial training shall occur prior to the adult having direct supervision of children. The annual review shall include a review of the Safe Sanctuaries policies, procedures for supervision, and current information on how to identify and report child abuse. The annual review may be a self-conducted reading of materials followed by a written self-test.

Trainings will occur on a time table decided upon by The Director of Christian Education. Trainings will be provided by The Director of Christian Education, The chairperson of SPRC, and/or other qualified, screened church member.

SUPERVISION: Supervision procedures are designed to reduce the possibility of abuse or exploitation of children, and to protect staff persons and volunteers from unfounded accusations.

Supervision Standards:

Programs and ministries of Bethel Hill shall use the following standards for the supervision of children, youth, and vulnerable adults: 1) The two adult rule – Regardless of the size group, there will always be at least two adults present. This may include the presence of an adult ‘roamer’ who moves in and out of rooms/ministry activities.

2) No child, youth, or vulnerable adult will be left unsupervised while participating in a ministry activity/event.

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

4) No person shall supervise an age group unless he/she is at least 18 years of age or older and is at least 5 years older than the children being supervised.

5) Ministry events involving transportation shall require a written consent form signed by the parent or guardian of the child.

REPORTING:

Reporting of an allegation of child abuse is required whenever there is “reasonable cause to suspect” that abuse has occurred (PA Child Protective Services Law), Title 23 Pa. C.S.A. Chapter 6311(B)). Reasonable cause to suspect abuse can occur under any of the following circumstance:

(i) The mandated reporter comes into contact with the child in the course of employment, occupation and practice of a profession or through a regularly scheduled program, activity or service.

(ii) The mandated reporter is directly responsible for the care, supervision, guidance or training of the child, or is affiliated with an agency, institution, organization, school, regularly established church or religious organization or other entity that is directly responsible for the care, supervision, guidance or training of the child.

(iii) A person makes a specific disclosure to the mandated reporter that an identifiable child is the victim of child abuse.

(iv) An individual 14 years of age or older makes a specific disclosure to the mandated reporter that the individual has committed child abuse. It is not necessary for a mandated reporter to observe the child in order for the mandated reporter to have reasonable cause to make a report of suspected child abuse.

It is not necessary for a mandated reporter to identify the alleged perpetrator to have reasonable cause to make a report of suspected child abuse.

Failure of a mandated reporter to file a report of suspected child abuse may result in criminal penalties.

Reports of suspected child abuse are made to the Pennsylvania Child Abuse Hotline (24-Hour service) at 1-800-932-0313, or the PA Department of Human Services established electronic filing system.

The mandated reporter shall enjoy civil and criminal immunity. The mandated reported is also entitle to an action against the employer if the reporter is terminated for making the report.

Persons other than a mandated reporter (permissive reporters) may make a report of child abuse, provided it is made in good faith and the reporter has reasonable cause to suspect a child is a victim of child abuse.

The Church Policy is:

- 1) All mandated reporters shall immediately make a report to Childline (1-800-932-0313) any time they have reasonable cause to suspect that a child has been the victim of abuse.
- 2) Immediately after making the report to Childline, the mandated reporter shall inform a designated person (the pastor or chairperson of PPRC if the pastor is involved or unavailable) at the church that a report has been filed.
- 3) This pastor. will then be responsible to facilitate the cooperation of the church with the investigation of the report by the authorities.
- 4) The requirement that the mandated reporter provide a written report to the state using the CY-47 form available from the conference website (www.epaumc.org) or the PA Department of Human Service within 48 hours of the oral report, and provide a copy of same to the church.
- 5) The pastor shall notify the District Superintendent.

In the event that a member of the clergy becomes aware of suspected child abuse as a result of confidential communication which is protected under 42 PA C.S. 5943 (relating to confidential communications to clergymen), the conference legal counsel should immediately be consulted.

Responses for Allegation of Abuse: Priority one is the safety of the child and others at risk. Specific circumstances and good judgment will dictate the need for issues such as medical attention, calling the police, notification, etc. It is recommended the person in knowledge of abuse or suspected abuse notify one or more of the following as appropriate: Pastor, Director of Youth Ministry, District Superintendent or chairperson of the Staff Parish Relations committee.

It takes great courage for a victim to report about the abuser's conduct. Many victims have been led to feel so close to their abuser that they do not want that person to "get in trouble". Some victims are conflicted as to their role in the abuse, erroneously believing that they consented to the abuse or brought it upon themselves. In any circumstance, however, it is imperative that any report be received with sensitivity and seriousness.

The church leadership will defer to the Pennsylvania law for requirements in reporting suspected or known child abuse to child protective services or to the local police. This includes:

PASTORAL RESPONSES FOR REPORTS OF ALLEGATIONS OF ABUSE:

Any allegation of abuse requires a process to address responding to the victim, the alleged perpetrator, and the press. The response must be quick, compassionate and unified. All allegations will be taken seriously. In all cases of reported abuse there shall be cooperation with all official investigating agencies.

Response to victims of abuse:

In the instance of any allegation of abuse, there shall be a reaching out to the victim and the victim's family. Pastoral resources shall be extended, and the conference I-Care Team can be contacted to assist in providing this service. The care and safety of the victim shall be considered the first priority. Response to the victim and the victim's family shall be done in a positive and supportive manner. The parents of the victim shall be notified and steps shall be taken to address the safety and well-being of the child until the parent(s) arrive. NOTE: If one or both of the parents is the alleged abuser, the direction of the child welfare authorities shall be followed concerning notification of others.

Response to all alleged perpetrators of abuse:

The alleged perpetrator shall immediately, yet with dignity and respect for their sacred worth, be removed from further involvement with children and advised that there has been an allegation of abuse. Details of the allegations of the abuse shall not be discussed with the alleged perpetrator at the time of removal. In any removal of a staff member or volunteer from any activity/ministry, care shall 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. When it has been alleged that a member of the church staff or a volunteer, has committed an act of abuse, the staff member or volunteer shall be required to refrain from all ministry activities/events with children until the incident has been fully resolved by the appropriate state authorities and/or in accordance with the Book of Discipline

Response to the Media:

The District Superintendent, the Conference Director of Communications and pastor shall decide on a single spokesperson for contact with the public/media. All media requests for statements shall be directed to that spokesperson.

Compliance:

Compliance with this policy shall be a matter of record at each annual Charge Conference.