



# Child Abuse Prevention Policy

## Green Pond United Methodist Church

Since 2007, churches in the South Carolina Conference of the United Methodist Church have sought to provide and implement Safe Sanctuaries practices. Each local church must maintain a Safe Sanctuaries policy and review it annually. The 2016 General Conference of the United Methodist Church adopted a resolution aimed at reducing the risk of child sexual abuse in the church:

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 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, emotional and sexual exploitation and abuse.”

Tragically, churches have not always been safe places for children. Child sexual abuse, exploitation, and ritual abuse (abusive acts committed as part of ceremonies or rites, 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 within churches. Virtually every congregation has among its members the 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.

– *The Book of Resolutions of The United Methodist Church*

Thus, in covenant with all United Methodist congregations, **Green Pond United Methodist Church** adopts this policy for the prevention of child abuse in our church:

### **I. Purpose**

The 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 of our children, youth and vulnerable adults.

### **II. Covenant Statement**

**Green Pond 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, youth and vulnerable adults – as well as all of our workers with children, youth and vulnerable adults. We

will follow reasonable safety measures when selecting and recruiting workers; we will implement appropriate operational procedures in all areas of programming and care; we will train our workers with children, youth and vulnerable adults on our procedures and policies; and we will have a clearly defined procedure for reporting a suspected incident of abuse consistent with South Carolina state law.

### III. Theological Reflection

We adopt this policy in accordance with the statement we as a congregation make at each baptism – that we will “nurture children and youth in the Christian faith and life and include them in our care.” With this policy, we renew our baptismal pledge to “live according to the example of Christ” and surround children and youth with a “community of love and forgiveness, that they may grow in their trust of God, and be thus confirmed and strengthened in the way that leads to life eternal.” (Baptismal Covenant II, United Methodist Book of Worship).

### IV. Volunteer and Staff Recruitment and Selection Guidelines

- A. **Age** – Volunteers and paid staff who work with children, youth and vulnerable adults in any position of authority must be at least 21 years of age and at least 5 years older than the age of the persons they are working to serve.
- B. **Church affiliation** – Volunteers and paid staff who work with children, youth and vulnerable adults must have been an active participant in regular worship (attending at least two Sundays each month) and another ministry at the church for at least 6 months.
- C. **Working with children, youth and vulnerable adults** – A satisfactory background check must be completed before volunteers and paid staff work with children, youth and vulnerable adults in the church.
- D. **Application** – Applicants must complete and sign an application form (staff) or information form (volunteers) and the related waivers giving permission to check references and background information.
- E. **Reference Checks** – Church leaders will check three references for each primary worker. The references will be performed by phone, by mail or in person.
- F. **Background Checks** – Criminal background checks will be made of all clergy, paid staff and volunteers who have supervisory program responsibility for youth (e.g. youth group leaders) and all other church employees.
- G. **Prior Convictions** – Individuals who have been convicted of physical or sexual abuse or neglect may not work in any church-sponsored activity or program for children, youth and vulnerable adults. Individuals who have been convicted of financial crimes will not work with money. Individuals who have been convicted of DUI in the past 5 years will not drive persons of any age.
- H. **Confidentiality of Information** – The church will keep confidential all information received in the applicant selection process. Selection information will be marked as such and stored in a locked location with limited access only by church staff and others with a need to know.

### V. Supervision Guidelines

- A. Two non-related adults will be present whenever possible during classroom activities, activities away from church facilities, and when transporting children, youth and vulnerable adults. A designated person will walk the halls and look in on activities.

- B. All doors to any room in which an activity is conducted will remain open, and all windows will remain unobstructed.
- C. One-on-one interactions with children, youth and vulnerable adults are sometimes necessary and appropriate, but care must be taken that they be conducted in an environment that provides visibility by other adults. All doors to any room in which such interactions are conducted will remain open and all windows will remain unobstructed.
- D. Legal guardians of children and youth, clergy and age-level volunteers and staff have the right to visit unannounced and observe any children or youth activity, classroom or church-sponsored program at any time.
- E. On outings away from church property:
  - a. Adults will have access to a telephone or cell phone at all times.
  - b. No youth will drive to or from church-related events.
  - c. Adults will not transport one individual child or youth
  - d. Anyone driving children, youth and vulnerable adults to a church-sponsored event must qualify under Section II above.
- F. When a church-related activity involves children, youth and vulnerable adults from another church or organization:
  - a. Groups using the church facility will follow all Safe Sanctuaries policies and procedures.
  - b. Group leaders will read all Safe Sanctuaries policies and sign an agreement to follow them.

## **VI. Social Media**

- A. Persons who are photographed at church-related activities will be provided the opportunity to sign a photo release form giving permission to post photos on the church website, social media, bulletin boards or other public forums.
- B. Leaders who work with children, youth and vulnerable adults will only use church-affiliated social media accounts – rather than personal accounts – when communicating with children, youth and vulnerable adults.

## **VII. Response By Church Workers To Allegations of Abuse**

If a suspected incident of abuse or neglect occurs at the church or is revealed to a volunteer or paid staff person at a church-sponsored activity, the following steps will be taken:

- A. The adult in charge of the activity will:
  - a. Ensure the safety of the child, youth or vulnerable adult and tend to his or her immediate needs, as the situation dictates.
  - b. Inform the pastor.
  - c. Fill out an Incident Report.

