

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 following is a reflection on the adopted resolution. (*Book of Resolutions*, 2016 #3084).

A central tenet of the Christian faith is the inherent value and worth of all children, youth, and adults. Children, youth, and other vulnerable people are least able to protect themselves in our society and are particularly vulnerable to abuse and neglect. The United Methodist Church is eager to do all it can to protect the youth, children, and other vulnerable people who participate in the life of this congregation.

We believe implementing a policy and adopting procedures to protect our children, youth, and other vulnerable people recognizes that:

Our Christian faith calls us to offer both hospitality and protection to our children, youth, and other vulnerable people. The Social Principles of the United Methodist Church state, "...children must be protected from economic, physical and sexual exploitation and abuse." The Social Principles also state, "...all persons are individuals of sacred worth, created in the image of God."

Tragically, churches have not always been safe places for children, youth, and other vulnerable people. Neglect, sexual abuse, and exploitation occur in churches, both large and small, urban and rural. The problem cuts across all economic, cultural, racial, and ethnic lines. God calls us to make our churches safe places, protecting children, youth, and other vulnerable people from abuse.

Abuse prevention and ministry protection policies and procedures are essential for congregations, not only for the protection and safety of our children, youth, and other vulnerable persons, but also for our volunteers and staff working with them.

The Gospel calls us to be engaged in ministry with children, youth, and other vulnerable persons (*Safe Sanctuaries: Reducing the Risk of Abuse in the Church for Children and Youth*, page 10).

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).

- We should not allow possible risks to undermine or stop our ministry. Rather, we must:
- Acknowledge the risks and develop a practical plan to address these issues;
- Take steps to prevent harm to our children, youth, and other vulnerable persons; and

- Continue to answer the Gospel's imperative to be in ministry with children, youth, and other vulnerable persons, thus making a difference in their lives. (adapted from *Safe Sanctuaries: Reducing the Risk of Abuse in the Church for Children and Youth*, page 10).

Safe Sanctuaries policies and implementation of practices that reflect those policies seek to fulfil this call for our church.

Volunteer/Staff Selection Policies

All volunteer and paid staff who work with children, youth, and other vulnerable people at Peterborough United Methodist Church will be:

- At least 21 years old. Exceptions apply for approved youth helpers.
- At least five years older than the oldest child/youth they will be supervising.
- Volunteers should be a regular attendee at Peterborough United Methodist Church for at least six months.

Rare exceptions may be made in consultation with the pastor in charge for special situations.

All volunteer and paid staff (including clergy) who work with children, youth and other vulnerable people at Peterborough UMC will:

- Complete and sign an application and the related waivers giving permission to check references and background information.
- Provide the names and contact information of three personal references.
- Undergo a criminal background check if they will have leadership responsibility for children/youth/other vulnerable people. 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 other vulnerable people.

When evaluating candidates, the following factors will be considered:

- Whether the applicant has previously committed an act of child abuse or molestation (anyone who has maltreated children may not serve in ministry with children, youth, or other vulnerable people).
 - The extent of professional counseling the applicant has received.
 - The opinion of references, especially professional counselors who have served the applicant.
 - The opinion of leaders in other churches or youth organizations in which the applicant has been involved, how closely the church is able to supervise and monitor the position for which the applicant is applying.
- o All applicants must be interviewed for suitability for the work they desire to do. Interviews will be conducted by the leader of the program in which the applicant will work. Church policy and guidelines should be discussed during the interview.

Training

Prior to working in the youth's or children's ministries (or any area including other vulnerable people), workers must undergo child protection safety training. Comprehensive training on issues of child sexual abuse in church settings shall be required for all clergy, paid staff, and volunteers (e.g., youth group leaders) who regularly supervise activities for children, youth, and other vulnerable people. This training should be offered at least annually.

Ministry Supervision Guidelines

Whenever supervising activities involving children and youth at Peterborough UMC,

- At least two non-related adults (including at least one screened adult) will always be present for all activities.
- Children, youth, and other vulnerable people will be checked into and out of a church-sponsored activity by their parent or legal guardian or people authorized by the parent/legal guardian. Attendance records will be maintained.
- Participants will have access to a telephone or cell phone when groups are at or away from the church facility.
- One-on-one interactions with children and youth will be with an open door and visible to all. The pastor, parent or guardian, or another screened adult should be aware of any such interactions.
- Activities with children, youth and other vulnerable populations should publicly accessible. Anyone has the right to visit and observe the children's/youth's/other vulnerable person's activity, classroom, or church sponsored program at any time, unannounced as long as the two-adult rule is being followed. Exceptions to this right may be issued at the discretion of church leadership.
- All classroom and office doors will have a window or be visible from the hallway, or doors should remain open while the room is occupied.
- Door windows will be kept free from adornment.
- If the two-adult rule cannot be observed, a screened, designated roamer will regularly check on groups with only one adult.
- For overnight events at the church and church-sponsored off-premise activities, two or more screened adults must be present. This arrangement must include at least one male and one female if the group is mixed gender.

Whenever Peterborough UMC transports children, youth, or other vulnerable people away from the church campus,

- No youth should drive to/from events.
- An adult should never transport a child/youth/other vulnerable person alone.
- Drivers of church vehicles should be approved and covered by the church's insurance company.

- Drivers should go through the same screening process as all other paid/volunteer staff.

The use of electronics or media communications may be useful tools in supporting ministries with children, youth, and other vulnerable people. However, in such circumstances, the following requirements shall be met:

- The volunteer or staff person shall never initiate a connection (friending, following, etc.) on social media.
- If a student initiates a connection, the child, youth, or vulnerable person's parent or guardian as well as the pastor in charge shall be notified.
- If an adult leader receives a private text from a child, youth, or vulnerable person that seems to be questionable, the adult leader should immediately end the conversation in the virtual space and offer opportunities to have the conversation in person and in compliance with the earlier guidelines for one-on-one conversations. The ministry supervisor and/or parent/guardian should be made aware of the incident immediately.

Note: If an in-person meeting is not possible, those involved will determine the most reasonable alternative in compliance with the earlier guidelines for one-on-one conversations.

- Adult leaders should post photos on social network sites only with prior written permission granted by a parent/guardian. When posted, PHOTOS MUST NOT BE TAGGED with names or location indicators. All photos must be appropriate and in keeping with the spirit of the ministry event.
- All in-person protection policies apply to online platform meetings like Zoom, Skype, Messenger, and so on. *(For example, two unrelated adults should be present in the virtual room just as they would be in a physical room.)*
- An official church account should be established and used for online activities, not a personal account.
- Communication about online meetings should be shared with parents/guardians as well as with children, youth, and other vulnerable people.
- Adult leaders and participants should use their real names as usernames.
- Attendance of online meetings should be documented.
- All electronic communications shall be documented and retained.

Whenever Peterborough UMC hosts an activity involving children, youth, or other vulnerable people from another church or community organization,

- Groups using the church facility will follow Peterborough UMC's Child, Youth, and Other Vulnerable People Protection Policies and procedures.

Peterborough UMC volunteer and paid staff, including clergy, will be given the opportunity for training about Safe Sanctuaries policies, procedures, and child abuse issues on a regular basis. They will be rescreened every three years.

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

- Ensure the safety of the child, youth, or other vulnerable person.
- Call the ministry supervisor, pastor in charge, or designee.
- Call the appropriate county/state hotline.

Congregational Covenant and Adoption

Peterborough United Methodist Church's purpose for establishing this Child, Youth, and Vulnerable Person Protection Policy and accompanying procedures is to demonstrate our total and unwavering commitment to the physical wellbeing, emotional safety, and spiritual growth of all our children, youth, and vulnerable people.

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, youth and other vulnerable people 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*, p.96).

This policy coordinates and supersedes the previous policies used by Peterborough UMC.

As a Christian community of faith and a United Methodist congregation, we are committed to conduct the ministry of the gospel in ways that assure the safety and spiritual growth of all our children, youth, and vulnerable people, as well as all the workers with the children, youth, and vulnerable people. By this policy and its accompanying procedures, we implement prudent operational procedures in all programs and events.

- a. Training: We will conduct training on this policy and its procedures to assure that adults involved in activities with children, youth, and vulnerable people are aware of these standards and will abide by them.
- b. Screening: All adults and minors above the age of fourteen who have a direct involvement with activities covered by this policy and its procedures will be screened in accordance with New England Annual Conference policy. All people who are subject to this policy will be rescreened every three (3) years. Any person who was screened but, for whatever reason, has been absent from the Peterborough UMC community for more than one (1) year and thereafter returns, will be rescreened.
- c. Supervision: All activities covered by this policy and its procedures will be supervised by the appropriate number of screened adults.