

Plainfield United Methodist Church **“Safe Sanctuaries” Policy** **2006**

Whereas in 1996, The General Conference of the United Methodist Church adopted a resolution aimed at addressing and reducing the risk of child abuse in the church. And whereas the resolution, reaffirmed in 2000 and 2004, begins with 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) occur in churches, both large and small, urban and rural. The problem cuts across all economic, cultural and racial lines. It is real, and 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 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. (From the *Book of Resolutions of the United Methodist Church* – 2004, pp 201-203).

Therefore, Plainfield United Methodist Church adopts the following policy, in keeping with the Safe Sanctuaries¹ resource booklet, for the protection of children and youth from abuse, neglect, and sexual misconduct.

Purpose: The purpose of this policy is to acknowledge the risks to children and youth and to reasonably address these risks at Plainfield United Methodist Church so that children and youth are protected from abuse, neglect, and sexual misconduct to the best of our ability.

Definitions (for the purposes of this document):

- 1. child – infant through fifth grader.**
- 2. junior high youth – sixth grader through eighth grader.**
- 3. senior high youth – high schooler.**
- 4. teacher – individual in charge of teaching or facilitating a class or group.**
- 5. helper – individual assisting the teacher.**
- 6. volunteer – unpaid person who has contact with children and youth.**
- 7. chaperone – person who escorts children and youth off-site.**
- 8. paid staff – persons who are hired by the church to work with children and youth. This includes staff members who request not to be compensated for their work.**

Procedures:

- ◆ **Volunteer Screening:** All individuals who work with children and youth will fill out a volunteer information form.²
- ◆ **Background Checks:** All paid and volunteer staff must consent to a background check. Results from completed background checks will be kept in a locked file cabinet. Only the Director of Christian Education and the pastoral staff will have access to these files. If a background check is flagged, the situation may be reviewed by the pastoral staff, Director of Christian Education, and the chair of the Staff/Parish Relations Committee.

¹ Melton, Joy Thornburg, *Safe Sanctuaries: Reducing the Risk of Child Abuse in the Church*, (Discipleship Resources: Nashville, TN), 1998.

² See attached form (A).

- ◆ **6 Month Rule:** All volunteers (excluding All God’s Children At Play participants and nursery helpers) will have been active participants at PUMC for 6 months. Exceptions will be made at the discretion of the Director of Christian Education and/or pastoral staff.
- ◆ **Five Years Older Rule:** All teachers and chaperones must be at least five years older than the children or youth they lead. Helpers should be at least three years older.
- ◆ **Volunteers Under 18:** Volunteers under the age of 18 will work alongside an adult.
- ◆ **Two-Deep Rule:** Two teachers or a teacher and a helper should be in the room with children and youth. In instances where an immediate situation makes it impossible for two people to be present, there should be an adult “floater” with visible and physical access to all areas to move from group to group. If a class or group does not have two volunteers and a floater is not available, the meeting should be combined with another group or cancelled. Jr. and Sr. High students do not require the same level of supervision due to their increased level of independence. There will be cases where a youth or group of youths will be meeting with one adult. In such a case, an additional floater should be present.
- ◆ **Open Door Rule:** All counseling and teaching sessions with children and youth will take place in rooms with windows or the door shall remain open while the room is in use.
- ◆ **Public Spaces:** Mentoring meetings between adults and youth should occur in a public place. Groups of youth may meet with only one adult or a pair of related adults if the meeting takes place in a public arena such as a restaurant, store, movie theater, etc. In such cases, the group will gather at the designated public spot and leave from a designated public spot.
- ◆ **Bathroom Use:** Children in 2nd grade and younger will be escorted to the bathroom. Children in 3rd grade through 5th grade will use the buddy system.
- ◆ **Disciplining Children:** A written policy for disciplining children should be available to all teachers, helpers, chaperones, and parents.³

³ See attached form (B).

- ◆ **Sign-in Procedures:** All infants through pre-kindergartners must be signed in and out from the nursery or Sunday School classroom by a parent or other authorized adult (as indicated on registration form).
- ◆ **Child Pick-Up:** Children up to fourth grade must be picked up from the classroom by their parents or authorized adult (as indicated on registration form), or written permission must be given.
- ◆ **Child Supervision:** Children through 5th grade should be supervised by an adult at all times during church programming. It is the responsibility of the parents/guardians to make sure children are supervised before, after, and in between church programming.
- ◆ **Diaper Policy:** Nursery workers or teachers may change diapers unless otherwise instructed by parents or guardians on sign-in/registration sheet. Gloves will be available and should be worn by volunteers when changing diapers.
- ◆ **Building Evacuation:** Evacuation procedures should be clearly posted.
- ◆ **Photo Policy:** Photos of children on church media will not include identification of individual children unless written consent is given.
- ◆ **Allergies and Medical Conditions:** A list of allergies or medical conditions of students will be given to the teachers.
- ◆ **First Aid/CPR Training:** First Aid educational opportunities will be offered and recommended for all volunteers. Information packets will be provided to volunteers. We recommend that the Director of Christian Education, Sunday School Superintendent, and a Pastor have current CPR certification. A First Aid kit will be available on each level of the building. Each classroom and the nursery will have a supply of band-aids and gloves. Accident report forms should be filled out for any incident or treatment given.⁴
- ◆ **Lodging:** Always have more than two people in a room. Exceptions are allowed only for family relations.

⁴ See attached form (C).

- ◆ **Transportation for Church Related Events:** Two adults will be present in a vehicle. Exceptions are only allowed in emergency situations or if written permission is given by a parent or guardian. Drivers will be at least 23 years old. All drivers must present a copy of their driver's license and current insurance card to the staff member in charge.
- ◆ **Policy Education:** Paid and volunteer staff will be educated about this policy and will sign that they have received a copy in writing. Paid and volunteer staff will also sign a covenant statement for working with children and youth.⁵
- ◆ **Policy Publication:** This Safe Sanctuaries Policy will be posted in visible areas of the church and available to all congregants.
- ◆ **Policy Review and Changes:** This policy is subject to review. Changes can be made by vote of the Administrative Council.

Response of leader who witnesses or has suspicions of an incident of child abuse:

1. Ensure the safety of the child. Do not confront the alleged abuser.
2. Immediately report your information to the Director of Christian Education or a Pastor. If a paid staff member is involved in the incident, report it immediately to the chair of the Staff/Parish Committee. In the absence of the chair of the Staff/Parish Committee, the chair of the Administrative Council should respond. Mandated reporters can directly alert the proper authorities.

The Director of Christian Education, Pastor, or Staff/Parish Chair will:

1. Notify the parent(s) or guardian(s) of the victim and ensure the child's safety until the parent(s) arrive. The safety of the victim is the church's primary concern.
2. Treat the accused abuser with dignity, but immediately remove him/her from further contact with the child. Do not confront the accused abuser.
3. Notify the senior pastor and the proper law enforcement or child protective service agency (Illinois Child Protective Service 1-800-252-2873, Plainfield Police Department 436-2341, IL DCFS 815-730-4000)

⁵ See attached form (D).

4. Notify the District Superintendent and Bishop, the church's insurance agent, and the church's attorney.
5. Keep a written record of all actions taken by the church in response.
6. Call upon the chair of Staff/Parish or the senior pastor to make any necessary statements or response to the media.
7. Prepare a brief, honest statement that can be made to the congregation without giving unnecessary details, placing blame, interfering with the victim's privacy, or violating confidentiality.
8. Be prepared to interface with law enforcement officials, child protective services, and authorities of the church.⁶

Confidentiality:

We must assume that an allegation against a person may or may not be true. Therefore, the details to the allegations must and will be kept confidential until such time as they are proven and released to media or church officials. A public statement that an alleged incident has occurred, naming the alleged offense but not names of the victim or accused should be immediately formulated after victims have been cared for and the details of the incident are recorded. Children's names should never be released.

Discipline of Children and Youth

⁶ Adapted from *Safe Sanctuaries*.

There will be times in your ministry when it will be necessary to discipline those you are responsible for watching. While the appropriate response will often depend upon the actions of the child or youth, there are certain general procedures to follow.

1. Never physically punish a child by grabbing, slapping, spanking, pushing, etc.
2. Give ample directions to children and youth as to appropriate behavior. Immediately point out inappropriate behavior.
3. If the child or youth does not respond to you, remove the individual from the situation and consult with the Director of Christian Education, youth leader, or pastor.
4. The responsibility for discipline ultimately lies with the parents or guardians. Notify the parents of problematic behavior.
5. While everyone is welcome at church organized events, there are expectations for appropriate behavior. If the child or youth continues to disrupt an event, group meeting, or class, the DCE or pastor will ask that the individual be removed from the event until they are able to join in appropriately.