

# Safe Sanctuaries Policy

## Faith United Methodist Church, Rockville, MD

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## **Purpose of Safe Sanctuaries Policy**

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The purpose of this Policy is to protect children, youth, and their families from abuse from volunteers and paid staff who work with children and youth. In addition the policy is set up to mitigate risks where abuse can occur.

The Church has a sacred duty to keep our children and youth safe from harm. Faith United Methodist Church utilized the Baltimore-Washington Conference recommended book *Safe Sanctuaries: Reducing the Risk of Child Abuse* in the Church by Joy Thornburg Melton as our guide, along with requirements from the Baltimore-Washington Conference.

The Policy is effective August 15, 2008.

## **Recruiting, Screening and Hiring**

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### **Requirements for adults and youth (ages 13-17) who work with children in Church Ministry Activities**

- 1) Activities include, but are not limited to, Sunday School classes, United Methodist Youth Fellowship (UMYF)/Youth Group Activities (both day, evening, and overnight), Vacation Bible School (VBS), Summer Camps sponsored by Faith United Methodist Church, Youth Work Trips, Confirmation Classes, and Retreats.
- 2) Attendance Status – Adults and youth must have been a regular attender for at least six months before being allowed to work with children and youth. A regular attender is defined as someone who attends worship at least twice a month. Prior to that time they are welcome to observe – they will not be counted as part of the two-adult rule.
- 3) Forms to complete for adults who regularly work with children and youth
  - a) Regular workers are adults who teach or lead groups of children and youth at least once a month or go on an overnight activity.
  - b) *Sexual Misconduct Questionnaire* (SMQ – see Appendix) at the beginning of every ministry year, which begins in September. The SMQ is required by the Baltimore-Washington Conference.
  - c) *Permission to Obtain Background Check* form (see Appendix) every five years, unless required by another organization for sooner. For example, Group WorkCamps, who we utilize for Youth Work Trips, requires a background check every three years. The Baltimore-Washington Conference requires their staff to complete every five years.
- 4) Forms to complete for adults who occasionally work with children and youth
  - a) Occasional workers are adults who teach or lead groups less than once a month, whether as a substitute or chaperone. These workers include people who provide meals for events, drive groups, assist once during VBS or Camp, and chaperone occasionally.

- b) *Sexual Misconduct Questionnaire* (SMQ – see Appendix) at the beginning of every ministry year, which begins in September. The SMQ is required by the Baltimore-Washington Conference.
  - c) Because most parents tend to help out occasionally, we are requesting that all parents complete a SMQ.
- 5) Forms to complete for youth (ages 13-17) who work with children and youth
- a) *Sexual Misconduct Questionnaire* (SMQ – see Appendix) at the beginning of every ministry year, which begins in September. The SMQ is required by the Baltimore-Washington Conference.
  - b) *Covenant for Youth Aides* (see Appendix) at the beginning of every ministry year, which begins in September. The Covenant is required by the Baltimore-Washington Conference.

### **Requirements for adults and youth (ages 13-17) who work with children in Non-Church Ministry Activities**

- 1) Activities are managed by groups outside of Faith United Methodist Church, who rent or utilize the building. They include, but are not limited to, Summer Camps not sponsored by Faith United Methodist Church, Language Classes, Reading Classes, and other Congregations where children are in classes or childcare (Miso Fellowship, Or HaOloam).
- 2) Other groups, such as Boy Scouts, Cub Scouts, and Girls Scouts, have their own policies to care for children and youth. Therefore, this Safe Sanctuaries Policy does not apply to them.
- 3) Forms to complete for all adults and youth who work with children and youth
  - a) *Sexual Misconduct Questionnaire* (SMQ – see Appendix) at the beginning of every ministry year, which begins in September. The SMQ is required by the Baltimore-Washington Conference.
  - b) *Statement of Compliance with Safe Sanctuaries Policy* (see Appendix), signed by the group's official representative, that they have read the policy, will comply with it, and either are returning completed SMQs or have completed SMQs or their organization equivalent and holding internally.

### **When does the paperwork get completed?**

- 1) In August of every year, the Director of Christian Education and SPRC will request all known volunteers to complete the appropriate paperwork.
- 2) For **returning workers**, they have until September 30<sup>th</sup> to complete their paperwork. They can still volunteer during this time period. If they do not turn in their paperwork by the designated time, then they will not be allowed to volunteer until it has been completed. This policy is in line with the Sexual Misconduct policy of the Baltimore-Washington Conference.
- 3) For **new workers**, they must complete their paperwork before they can start volunteering regardless of whether it's at the beginning of the ministry year or throughout the year. In addition, they are required to discuss their involvement with the Director of Christian Education or one of the Pastors prior to working,

so that we can discern whether there is an appropriate fit and motivation for the work.

- 4) Throughout the ministry year, which begins in September, **occasional workers** may be tasked for specific activities and the forms be completed then. All parents will be asked to complete the SMQ as many may be called upon to assist throughout the year.

## **Basic Procedures and Practices for Safe Ministry**

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### **Two Adult Rule**

- 1) Two adults are required to be at all activities where children and youth are participating. One must be at least 21 years old.
- 2) For overnight activities or day field trips where there is a mixed gender of children and youth, there must be at least one adult male and one adult female. The preferred ratio is at least one adult to five children/youth, based on gender mix. One must be at least 21 years old.
- 3) If the activity does not have two adults, then the activity is cancelled.
- 4) Youth workers (ages 13-17) do not count as adults for this rule. If a youth volunteers for an activity, the two adult rule must still be followed.

### **Five-Years Older Rule**

- 1) Adult workers (age 18+) must be at least five years older than the oldest child or youth in the activity or age 21 or older.
- 2) Youth workers (age 13-17) must also be at least five years older than the oldest child or youth in the activity.

### **Open Door Counseling**

Adults who provide counseling to children and youth must adhere to the following rules:

- 1) No one-on-one counseling behind closed doors. The door must remain open, unless the door has a window in it.
- 2) Another adult must be nearby.

### **First Aid/CPR**

- 1) For overnight activities or day field trips, at least one adult must have current certification in basic First Aid and CPR.

### **Windows in All Classroom Doors**

Effective September 1, 2008, all classroom doors will have a window. The Director of Christian Education, or designated volunteer, will walk the halls during Sunday school to monitor the classes.

## **Storage and Handling of Forms and Data**

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All forms will be stored in a locked file cabinet in the Senior Pastor's office. Access is restricted to the Senior Pastor, Director of Christian Education, SPRC Chair, and SPRC SMQ review group.

All background checks will be processed by authorized staff.

## **Response to Allegations of Abuse**

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All allegations of abuse or neglect will be taken seriously. We must respond faithfully and honestly to the victim, the accused, and the congregation.

The reporting process includes:

- 1) The parties involved – the reporter of the abuse, the victim, and the accused
- 2) Church Leadership – The Senior Pastor, Associate Pastor, Director of Christian Education, and SPRC Chair
- 3) Baltimore-Washington Conference – District Superintendent or designee
- 4) Maryland Department of Social Services, Child Protective Services – Must be notified immediately in verbal form and within 48 hours in written form.
- 5) Media
- 6) The Congregation – Refer to section on *Plan for Caring After Abuse*
- 7) Church's Insurance Carrier

**The reporter's responsibility** – The reporter is the person who is aware of the alleged abuse and needs to report it to someone on staff at Faith United Methodist Church.

- 1) If the incident recently occurred, the reporter's first responsibility is to protect the child by removing him or her from the location of the accused, securing the scene, and safeguarding any other children in the accused's care.
- 2) The reporter must also contact the Senior Pastor, Associate Pastor, or Director of Christian Education to inform him or her of the situation. If the incident occurred recently (as in #1), the staff person is also responsible for the same actions as in #1.

**The Senior Pastor upon receiving information or allegation of abuse or neglect, shall immediately:**

- 1) Contact the District Superintendent or designee for possible guidance on reporting.
- 2) Comply with Maryland law by reporting the abuse or neglect (see appendix for text of Maryland law). Maryland law requires verbal notice immediately and written notice within 48 hours of the initial report.

- 3) Inform the Associate Pastor, Director of Christian Education, and SPRC Chair, if they don't already know.
- 4) If the Senior Pastor is not available, such as he or she is on vacation or at a conference, the Senior Pastor's designee, which is typically the Associate Pastor, will perform these acts in his or her place.

**To comply with Maryland law, Faith United Methodist Church will use the following procedure in reporting suspected child abuse and neglect:**

- 1) The law we're referring to is in the Appendix. Refer to Section .04 – Reporting Suspected Child Abuse or Neglect.
- 2) The Senior Pastor will contact the local department of social services or a local law enforcement agency with a verbal report. Per Maryland Law, this is required immediately.
- 3) Within 48 hours, a written report must be made. The local agency will provide forms to do this written communication (section B.2).
- 4) The report shall include the following information (section D):
  - a) The names and home addresses of the child, both parents, and any other individual responsible for the care of the child
  - b) The present location of the child
  - c) The child's age
  - d) The specific nature and extent of injury, sexual abuse, or failure to provide proper care and attention of the child, and any other information known to the individual making the report of possible previous abuse or neglect
  - e) Any other information that might aid in establishing the cause of injury and identifying the individual or individuals responsible for the abuse or neglect.
- 5) Contact Information for the Department of Social Services, Child Protective Services for Montgomery County:  
Telephone – 240-777-4417 (available 24 hours)  
Fax – 240-777-4258  
Department of Health & Human Services  
1301 Piccard Drive  
Rockville, MD 20850
- 6) Faith will comply with all requests that are made by Social Services during the investigation process until the process is complete.

**Following the completion of the mandatory reporting requirements, the Senior Pastor will:**

- 1) Remove the accused from further work with children and youth until the investigation is complete as determined by the Senior Pastor and the Director of Christian Education. The District Superintendent may be consulted. The person accused of abuse or neglect will be notified in writing of this suspension.
- 2) Keep regular contact with the District Superintendent or designee, informing him or her of the status, asking for guidance, and providing support as needed.

- 3) Contact the Church's insurance carrier and attorney to inform them of the situation.

**Faith Church must also be prepared to respond to inquiries from the media:**

- 1) Faith Church shall designate a spokesperson tasked to respond to media inquiries regarding allegations of abuse or neglect. The spokesperson should be the church attorney or legal spokesperson for the church.
- 2) As soon as the allegation of abuse or neglect is reported to the authorities, the spokesperson shall develop a statement for the media. In developing an initial response and subsequent communications, the spokesperson will develop and coordinate any response with the Senior Pastor, church attorney, and the District Superintendent or Baltimore-Washington Conference designee.
- 3) In the event that Faith Church receives a request for information from the media regarding an allegation of abuse or neglect, the designated spokesperson is the only person authorized to make statements to the media.
- 4) Faith Church staff and others not assigned media duties should decline invitations to speak with the media and should forward all requests for statements to the past with copies to the spokesperson.

## **Plan for Caring After Abuse**

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### **Care of the persons involved**

Faith Church will offer counseling to all persons involved in the incident. Given the delicate nature of the incident, Faith will coordinate with counselors from outside the church.

### **Care for the congregation**

- 1) As soon as practically possible and without identifying the victim or the accused, the Senior Pastor or Associate Pastor will inform the congregation of the alleged incident of abuse or neglect and the actions taken by the church to respond to the incident and to safeguard children and youth in the church's ministries.
- 2) After the initial communication to the congregation, the Senior Pastor or Associate Pastor may conduct a follow-up meeting with the congregation to address the concerns of the congregation. This meeting will include lay leadership and, if necessary, Baltimore-Washington Conference representation.

## **Review Process of Safe Sanctuaries Policy**

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**The Review Team consists of** the Senior Pastor, Associate Pastor, Director of Christian Education, SPRC Chair, Lay Leader, a Parent Representative, and other members of SPRC as desired.

**In the event that an allegation of abuse or neglect is made**, the Review Team will review the Policy in light of the findings from the Social Services investigation, to ensure that the Policy adequately protects children and youth.

**On an annual basis**, the Review Team will review the Policy to ensure that the Policy adequately protects children and youth. Feedback may be solicited from workers and parents.

## **Training**

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### **Adults and youth who regularly work with children and youth in Church Ministry Activities will be required to:**

- 1) Initial Training – Participate in a full training session prior at the beginning of their service.
  - a) The session is 45 minutes to 1 hour long and covers the full Safe Sanctuaries Policy.
  - b) The training is offered in September and January.
  - c) They will receive a copy of this Safe Sanctuaries Policy and be required to sign off that they have read the Policy and participated in the training.
  - d) Since this is a new policy effective August 15, 2008, all regular workers will be required to take the training session, regardless of how long of service they have.
- 2) Refresher Training – Every five years, they must attend the training session again, with the appropriate sign-offs.
- 3) If changes to the policy are made, they will be notified in writing. If the policy changes are significant, additional training may be required.

### **Adults and youth who occasionally work with children and youth in Church Ministry Activities will be required to:**

- 1) Receive a copy of this Safe Sanctuaries Policy.
- 2) Sign a statement that they have read the Policy.
- 3) This will be done annually.

### **Organizations who are involved in Non-Church Ministry Activities will be required to:**

- 1) Receive a letter and a copy of this Safe Sanctuaries Policy.
- 2) Sign a statement that they have read the Policy.
- 3) This will be done annually.

All signed statements will be tracked and stored in the locked cabinet in the Senior Pastor's office.

## The Charge Conference

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On an annual basis at the Charge Conference, Faith Church will certify, in writing, that a policy has been developed and is in use. Included in this certification is assurance that the Sexual Misconduct Questionnaire (SMQ) is used in conjunction with the Safe Sanctuaries Policy.

## Definitions

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**Abuse and neglect**, as defined by the Maryland Department of Human Resources:<sup>1</sup>

- 1) Child abuse means one or more of the following by a parent, caretaker, or household or family member:
  - a) Physical injury, not necessarily visible, or mental injury of a child, under circumstances that indicate that the child's health or welfare is harmed or at substantial risk of being harmed; or
  - b) Sexual abuse of a child, regardless of whether the child has physical injuries. Sexual abuse means any act that involves sexual molestation or exploitation of a child. It includes, but is not limited to exposure, voyeurism, sexual advances, kissing, or fondling; sexual crime in any degree including rape, sodomy, or prostitution; or allowing, encouraging, or engaging in obscene or pornographic display, photographing, filming, or depiction of a child in a manner prohibited by law.
- 2) Child neglect means one or more of the following by a parent or caretaker:
  - a) A failure to provide proper care and attention to a child, including leaving a child unattended, under circumstances that indicate that the child's health or welfare is harmed or placed at substantial risk of harm; or
  - b) Mental injury or a substantial risk of mental injury of a child that is caused by the failure to provide proper care and attention to a child.
- 3) Mental injury means the observable, identifiable, and substantial impairment of a child's mental or psychological ability to function.

### Children, Youth and Adult Definitions

- 1) Child or Youth means anyone under the age of 18.
- 2) Adult means anyone 18 years of age or older. They can be either paid staff or volunteers.
- 3) Youth Volunteer means anyone who is 13 to 17 years old.

**Ministry Year** begins September 1<sup>st</sup> in the current year and ends August 31<sup>st</sup> in the following year.

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.dsd.state.md.us/comar/>, Code of Maryland Regulations, Department of Human Resources, Title 07, Subtitle 02, Chapter 07 (Child Protective Services – Investigation of Child Abuse and Neglect).

## Appendix

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- Forms
  - Sexual Misconduct Questionnaire (SMQ)
  - Permission to Obtain a Background Check
  - Covenant for Youth Aides
  - Statement of Compliance with Safe Sanctuaries Policy
  - Completion of Safe Sanctuaries Training (Regular Workers)
  - Completion of Safe Sanctuaries Training (Occasional Workers)
- Maryland State Law as it applies to child abuse and neglect