

**Holland's United Methodist Church
Safe Sanctuary Policy and Procedures**

Effective Date: November 2015

INTRODUCTION

The General Conference of The United Methodist Church, in April 1996, adopted a resolution aimed at reducing the risk of child, youth, and vulnerable adult abuse in the church. The adopted resolution includes the following statement: Holland's United Methodist Church (the "Church") will join with all United Methodist congregations to work towards the prevention of child, youth, and vulnerable adult abuse in our church.

STATEMENT OF COVENANT

As a Christian community of faith and a United Methodist congregation, we pledge to conduct the ministry of the gospel in ways that assure the safety and spiritual growth of all our children, youth, vulnerable adults, their families and those who work with them. It is our policy to:

- follow reasonable safety measures in the selection and recruitment of workers;
- implement prudent operational procedures in our programs and at our events;
- educate our workers regarding the use of appropriate policies and methods;
- follow a clearly defined procedure for reporting a suspected incident of any abuse or neglect; and
- be prepared to manage and respond to the congregation and media inquiries if an incident occurs.

In all of our ministries with children, youth, and vulnerable adults, this congregation is committed to demonstrating the love of Jesus Christ so that each person will be "surrounded by steadfast love, . . . established in the faith, and confirmed and strengthened in the way that leads to life eternal" ("Baptismal Covenant II," *United Methodist Hymnal*, p. 44).

Important Definitions

- ❖ **NC Definition of Abuse-**'Abused juvenile' means any child younger than age 18 whose parent, guardian, custodian, or caregiver:
 - Inflicts or allows to be inflicted upon the child a serious physical injury by other than accidental means
 - Creates or allows to be created a substantial risk of serious physical injury to the child by other than accidental means
 - Uses or allows to be used upon the child cruel or grossly inappropriate procedures or cruel or grossly inappropriate devices to modify behavior
- ❖ **NC Definition of Neglect-** 'Neglected juvenile' means a child: Who does not receive proper care, supervision, or discipline from his or her parent, guardian, custodian, or caregiver
 - Who is not provided necessary medical or remedial care
 - Who lives in an environment injurious to his or her welfare
 - Who has been placed for care or adoption in violation of law

'Serious neglect' means conduct, behavior, or inaction of the juvenile's parent, guardian, custodian, or caregiver that evidences a disregard of consequences of such magnitude that the conduct, behavior, or inaction constitutes an unequivocal danger to the juvenile's health, welfare, or safety, but does not constitute abuse.

- ❖ **NC Definition of Sexual Abuse-** The term 'abused juvenile' includes any child younger than age 18 whose parent, guardian, custodian, or caregiver commits, permits, or encourages the commission of a violation of the following laws regarding sexual offenses by, with, or upon the child:
 - First and second degree rape or sexual offense
 - Rape of a child by an adult offender
 - Sexual act by a custodian
 - Crime against nature or incest
 - Preparation of obscene photographs, slides, or motion pictures of the child
 - Employing or permitting the child to assist in a violation of the obscenity laws
 - Dissemination of obscene material to the child
 - Displaying or disseminating material harmful to the child
 - First and second degree sexual exploitation of the child
 - Promoting the prostitution of the child
 - Taking indecent liberties with the child
- ❖ **NC Definition of Emotional Abuse-** The term 'abused juvenile' includes any child younger than age 18 whose parent, guardian, custodian, or caregiver creates or allows to be created serious emotional damage to the child. Serious emotional damage is evidenced by a child's severe anxiety, depression, withdrawal, or aggressive behavior toward himself or others.
- ❖ **Child-Infant to Grade 5**
- ❖ **Youth-Grade 6-Grade 12**
- ❖ **Vulnerable Adult-** A person over the age of 18 needing assistance with basic life skills.
- ❖ **Regular Worker-**Any person, whether full-time or part-time, volunteer or paid, clergy or lay, who has regular, frequent, and/or overnight contact and supervision of children, youth and/or vulnerable adults.
- ❖ **Occasional Worker-**Any person, whether full-time or part-time, volunteer or paid, clergy or lay, who is occasionally asked to supervise children, youth and/or vulnerable adults.
- ❖ **Staff Member-** A person employed by the Church.
- ❖ **Screened Adult-** An adult who has been screened with a background check through a recognized third party employee screening agency.

Recruiting Workers

- Regular workers must be actively pursuing a relationship with Jesus Christ through the study of God's Word, worship, and a fellowship with peers.
- Regular workers are not required to be a member of the Church; however, he or she should have been active with peers in the life of this congregation for at least six months prior to taking responsibilities in the ministries for children, youth and/or vulnerable adults. Exceptions may apply in the case of new Staff members hired to work with youth or children as a normal function of their responsibilities.
- Regular and occasional workers must be at least 5 years older than the oldest child/youth. This does not apply for events for vulnerable adults.

Screening Workers

- Prior to working with children, youth and/or vulnerable adults, each occasional and regular worker will sign a "Participation Covenant Statement" verifying that he/she has read, understood, and agrees to abide by this "Safe Sanctuaries Policy" (the "Policy").
- Regular workers shall complete a criminal background check. Background checks must be repeated every four years. Applications, references, and interviews may also be a part of the recruitment and screening process.
- The Safe Sanctuaries Committee shall determine the final list of positions falling under the "Screened Adult" definition based upon recommendations of Staff Members and/or any committee responsible for children, youth and/or vulnerable adult activities.
- Any person convicted of sexual or physical abuse or any crime against a minor will be rejected as a worker with children and youth. Notification of rejection shall be handled by the Lead Pastor or his/her designee. Any person under serious allegations of abuse should be placed on temporary leave from such work until such allegations can be substantiated or discredited.
- All records relating to staff or volunteers working in Children's, Youth, and Vulnerable Adult Ministries will be kept in a locked cabinet with access only to the Pastor, the Chairman of the PSMT or their designee.

Hiring Workers

- Persons employed by the Church must be screened by means of a written application form, interview by the Personnel Support and Management Team (the "PSMT") or its designee, reference check, previous employment check, and criminal background check.
- The criminal background check must be repeated every four years.
- Applicants will not be discriminated against on the basis of race, color, sex, age, ethnic origin, or disability.

The "Two-Adult" Rule

- Ideally, two or more unrelated regular workers should be present at all times during a Children's or Youth Ministry event. However, when this is not possible, at least one regular worker and one occasional worker or assigned roaming monitor must be present.
- A recommended ratio (average) of 1 adult per 6 children or 1 adult per 10 youth will be present during children, youth, and/or vulnerable adult activities, including events that require vehicle travel and off-campus events.
- No one under 18 or less than 5 years older than the oldest child/youth will have sole supervisory responsibility. Exceptions apply to emergency situations, vulnerable adult ministry programs, and hired interns or staff members.
- Contacts outside a Children's or Youth Ministry event between a regular worker and one, two, or three students must take place in a public setting. Exceptions to this rule require prior consent from parent/guardian of every child or youth involved.

Sign-in and Release of Children

- A Sign-In procedure will be implemented for all programs for children
- Children under 4th grade will be released only to parents/guardians or according to a procedure authorized by the parent.
- Fourth and fifth graders may be released to return to parents after a Children's Ministry event.

Notice to Parents

- Parents/guardians should be kept informed about programs in which their children/youth are involved.
- Parents/guardians should be given advance notice and information about any activity which deviates from the regular programs offered by the Church.

Interpersonal boundaries

- All regular and occasional workers should personally adhere to expectations of appropriate dress codes, language, and demonstrations of affection and encouragement.
- All regular and occasional workers must address any form of harassment or bullying, including pranks which intrude upon a person's body or belongings or embarrass or humiliate another person.
- A Participation Covenant for Youth Ministries establishing behavior standards should be shared with youth and their parent(s) at the beginning of the school year.

Restroom Policy

- No child, youth or vulnerable adult shall be alone with an adult in the restroom except in cases of emergency.
- A regular or occasional worker shall wait outside the restroom door if he or she must leave the classroom/activity to take a child to the restroom.
- In the case of young children who need assistance, the restroom door must be left open.
- The 2-adult rule should be followed when diapers are being changed.

Media & Cyber Safety

- Regular workers should not "friend" a child, youth, or vulnerable adult on social media.
- Regular workers may accept a friend request from a child, youth or vulnerable adult (if they are of appropriate age for the social media).
- The church will seek parental permission for posting pictures, sharing basic information, and directly communicating with youth by email, cell phone, instant message, text, etc.
- Photos that are published on church sponsored sites should not include name or contact information for children or youth.
- Social media sites for youth and children's ministries at Holland's UMC will be "closed" sites whereas persons must request to join, if the option is available.
- Parents/Guardians will have the option to decline viewing of any movies that are unrated or are rated older than their child.

Transportation

- Drivers must be screened adults (no one under the age of 18), hold a valid North Carolina driver's license, and not have more than 1 moving violation in the past year. Upon subsequent violations, the adult worker must decline to provide transportation for church-sponsored activities until the period of a year has passed.
- Drivers and passengers are expected to follow all traffic laws (use of seat belts, speed, car seat regulations, etc.)
- Parents must give permission for their child or youth to be transported (in a group or alone) with an unrelated adult except in an emergency.
- Vehicles used for out-of-town trips will have a first aid kit and a cell phone. Copies of contact and medical information as well as permission forms should accompany children/youth/vulnerable adults on activities involving travel or sports.
- Vehicles are encouraged to travel together.

Overnight Stays

- Housing should have interior doors, if possible.
- Adults are housed separately (but nearby) from children or youth, if possible.
- Parents and their own children may share a room.
- Only Screened Adults may share a room with unrelated children or youth.
- Sleeping arrangements should be assigned according to gender.

Discipline

- If a child/youth is in need of correction during a church-sponsored event, the following methods may be used:
 1. Verbal correction, delivered in a calm manner, which addresses the specific issue.
 2. Brief time-out within the room following the general rule of 1 minute per year of age.
 3. Contact to the parent(s)/guardian(s).
- If the misbehavior continues, a plan to address the behavior will be developed by the Director of Youth and Children's Ministries and other appropriate staff members.
- Corporal punishment is not allowed.

Open Door, Limited Counseling

- Counseling is confidential.
- In cases of possible harm to self or others, information cannot be kept confidential and should be shared to those who have "a need to know."
- Parents should be immediately notified of any possibility of self-harm or suicide.
- Counseling should be limited in scope, should be done by a staff member or a regular worker, & should occur where there is 1 or more persons nearby (but not within hearing distance.), in a room where there is a window in the door or the door is open, and when another staff member or screened adult has been informed.

Appropriate Facility, Equipment and Insurance

- Windows in doors must remain uncovered except in overnight situations such as a lock-in or WIHN.
- First aid kits and defibrillator are available in designated places in the Church.
- First Aid kits will be checked periodically and prior to trips to ensure appropriate supplies are available.
- Facilities and grounds should be periodically checked for safety hazards.
- The church shall carry adequate property and liability insurance for the scope of the Church's ministries, including sexual abuse coverage.

Emergencies

- All regular and occasional workers should be alert and attentive to any potential physical, emotional, spiritual, or relational danger to children and youth at all times.
- Any accident that results in serious injury must be reported on the "Accident/Medical Emergency Report" form and given promptly to a Staff Member. If the Staff Member receiving the report is not the Pastor, the Staff Member will give a report to the Lead Pastor within 24 hours.

Training and Support

- First Aid/CPR training opportunities will be shared with workers regularly.
- Periodic training sessions on Safe Sanctuaries policy and procedures shall be offered at the Church for anyone working with children/youth/vulnerable adults.
- Regular workers will be recognized and affirmed by the congregation on an annual basis.

Non-church-sponsored events involving children/youth

- Leaders or other authorized representatives of the organization (such as Boy Scouts of America) which use the Church facilities must sign a statement agreeing to adhere to the Policy.
- Other non-organization groups (such as family reunions or other private events) will be made aware of the Policy.
- Holland's UMC does not assume responsibility for full compliance with Safe Sanctuaries for non-church-sponsored events.

Reporting of Suspected Abuse/Neglect

- **Any person, regardless of volunteer or employment status, is required by NC state law § 7B-301 to report immediately any suspicion of abuse, neglect, or dependency to the Wake County Department of Human Services (919) 212-7000 or other applicable county department of social services.**
- Adult workers must make themselves aware of the reporting laws for NC. Resources to understand NC law and resources for understanding how to report abuse are available from Prevent Child Abuse of NC at www.preventchildabusenc.org and 1-800-CHILDREN.

Regular and Occasional Workers will:

- Cease investigation once abuse or neglect is suspected.
- Assure the immediate safety of the child, youth, or vulnerable adult. If there is an immediate danger, call 911.
- Promptly report the incident to a Staff Member. If the accused is a Staff Member, the report should be made to the PSMT.
- Report the incident to the appropriate department of social services. The person should complete the "Report of Suspected Incident of Child/Youth Abuse" form.

Staff Members will:

- Witness the report to Child Protection and promptly inform the Lead Pastor.
- Form a Response Team (This is the responsibility of the Lead Pastor or PSMT Chair if the accused is a staff member.) It is recommended that the Response Team will consist of:
 - ✓ Lead Pastor
 - ✓ Chair of Trustees
 - ✓ Chair of Church Council
 - ✓ Chair of PSMT
 - ✓ Director of Children's and Youth Ministries
 - ✓ Other involved staff members
 - ✓ chairs of related church committees
 - ✓ member-at-large (preferably from the field of law, social services, education or medicine) The member-at-large shall be selected by the Lead Pastor, the Chair of Trustees, the Chair of Church Council, the Chair of PSMT, and the Director of Children's and Youth Ministries. A Coordinator of the Response Team will be selected by that group from the members of the Response Team.
- Respond to any media inquiries. (Lead Pastor, PSMT Chair, or designee).

Response Team will:

- File the completed "Report of Suspected Incident of Child/Youth Abuse" in a designated secure place. This secure place shall be accessible to only the Coordinator of the Response Team and the Lead Pastor if the accused is a volunteer. The Chair of the PSMT will have access to the records if the accused is a Staff Member.
- Fully cooperate with Protective Services and/or law enforcement including following advice regarding the notification of parents/guardians, or if a statement should be made to the congregation.
- Notify the NC Methodist Conference, the church attorney, and insurance carrier.
- Remove the suspected offender from further involvement with children, youth, or vulnerable adults until the department of social services has completed its investigation and it has been evaluated by the Response Team.
- Consider the needs for supportive care of the affected persons as related to the Church's ministry. Supportive care may include procedures of the criminal justice system, provision of the current Book of Discipline, appropriate counseling referrals, and pastoral visitation.

The Response Team is NOT intended to advocate for any party, act as legal counsel, determine guilt or innocence, or replace the functions of the PSMT.

Church Participation of a Convicted and/or Registered Sex Offender

- If a convicted and/or registered sex offender wishes to be a part of the church community, a carefully constructed and openly negotiated covenant between the offender and the church community will be developed.
- The covenant will include participation in a professional counseling program, adult "covenant" partners to accompany the offender, areas of the church that are "off-limits," etc.
- The covenant is signed by the pastor(s), the offender, and the Chair of the Church Council.