

## WESLEY UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

### SAFE SANCTUARY POLICY

“Now it is required that those who have been given a trust must prove faithful.” *1 Corinthians 4: 2*

#### **Purpose**

As caring Christians, we are committed to protect and advocate for children, youth and vulnerable adults participating in the life of the church AND all adults (paid staff and volunteers) who work with them. In the context of its ministries, Wesley United Methodist Church (Wesley UMC) is entrusted to provide a safe, spiritually-grounded and healthy environment for children, youth and vulnerable adults. This policy and accompanying procedures has been established for the purpose of demonstrating our total and unwavering commitment to this end.

#### **Covenant Statement**

Wesley UMC hereby pledges to conduct the ministry of Jesus Christ in ways that address 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 and volunteers. We will train our paid staff and volunteers who work with children, youth and vulnerable adults on our policies and procedures. We will have a clearly defined procedure for reporting a suspected incident of abuse consistent with the laws of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania.

#### **Theological Reflection**

We adopt this policy in accordance with the statement that 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, UM Book of Worship, p. 96)

#### **Definitions**

- Volunteers: unpaid persons serving in ministry with children, youth and vulnerable adults
- Children: persons from birth through fifth grade
- Nursery: limited to birth through age 5 (or pre-K)
- Youth: persons from sixth grade through age 17
- Adults: persons a minimum of age 18
- Paid Staff: personnel on the payroll of Wesley UMC
- Parent: parent or legal guardian
- Certified: paid staff or volunteers who have been trained and approved to be leaders of children, youth and vulnerable adult programs
- Uncertified: volunteers, parents and/or older youth who have not been trained or approved as leaders of children, youth and vulnerable adult programs
- Vulnerable Adult: anyone age 18 and over who is in need of community services because he/she is unable to take care of him/herself; is unable to protect him/herself against significant harm or exploitation; or may have learning disability, mental illness, physical disability, visual and hearing impairment, HIV/AIDS, or advanced age
- Unrelated Adult Leaders: leaders who are not members of each other’s immediate family
- Approved Adult Leader: leader coming from a non-church related group using Wesley’s facility
- Organized Activity: event formally organized by the church

## **Steps for Certification**

The following steps are required for certification:

*For paid staff/volunteers who have been serving for an extensive period of time at Wesley UMC*

- Must have completed up-to-date clearances for criminal record check through PA State Police AND child abuse history through PA Department of Welfare; clearances must be updated every five years and/or when an individual changes county of residence (App. A & B)
- Must have attended a Safe Sanctuaries training event, at the Annual Conference level OR led by someone in the local church; training will be offered on a regular basis by the local church
- Must have signed and dated a copy of the Verification Form, indicating that applicant has read and understands policy and has had an opportunity to ask any questions about policy (App. C)

*For new paid staff/volunteers*

- Must be actively involved in the life of the church for at least six months prior to applying to work with children, youth or vulnerable adults; exceptions to this will be for paid staff hired to work directly with Children and/or Youth ministries
- Must complete an application form including personal references from three un-related adults who could speak to applicant's ability to work with children, youth or vulnerable adults (App. D)
- Must be willing to interview with the pastor and another currently-active adult volunteer or paid staff person upon request by Safe Sanctuaries Committee
- Must have completed up-to-date clearances for criminal record check through PA State Police AND child abuse history through PA Department of Welfare; clearances must be updated every five years and/or when an individual changes county of residence (App. A & B)
- Must have attended a Safe Sanctuaries training event, at the Annual Conference level OR lead by someone in the local church; training will be offered on a regular basis by the local church
- Must have signed and dated a copy of the Verification Form, indicating that applicant has read and understands policy and has had an opportunity to ask any questions about policy (App. C)

## **Confidential Filing**

All information (clearances, applications, personal references, etc.) will be kept on file at the Wesley Church office. All information will be confidential, with access limited to current pastor, Chair of Safe Sanctuaries Committee and/or other staff working directly with children, youth, or vulnerable adults.

## **Overall Safety Guidelines**

1. Whenever possible, a minimum of two unrelated certified adults will be present at all times working with children, youth and vulnerable adults. (When NOT possible, see role of "roamer".) Teams of two related adults are valued within the programs of Wesley UMC. However, it is recommended that another certified or uncertified adult be present in these situations. Uncertified adults or older youth are welcome to assist or observe, but not provide sole leadership. Outside of counseling performed by any of our paid staff, on occasions where one-on-one interactions are necessary OR where one adult is supervising multiple children, youth or vulnerable adults in a separate activity, care should be given to be within sight of another unrelated adult. If at all possible, an adult should never be alone AND out of sight with one child, youth or vulnerable adult.
2. In situations where an escort is needed for a trip to the restroom, a volunteer will stand outside the restroom and only assist the child, youth or vulnerable adult if needed. Whenever a volunteer is in the restroom with the child, youth or vulnerable adult, the door should remain open. The volunteer should never be in a closed-door situation with a child, youth or vulnerable adult. If a child, youth or vulnerable adult soils themselves during an event, every effort will be made to locate a parent/guardian. If a parent/guardian is unable to be located, two volunteers will be present while cleaning up the child, youth or vulnerable adults. Parent/guardian will be notified if assistance was necessary. (Volunteer may also fill out an incident report.)

3. All certified adult worker with children and youth should be at least five years older than the oldest child in the group.
4. No one under the age of 18 will be permitted to provide direct and sole leadership of events for children, youth and vulnerable adults. Wesley UMC values the presence of youth volunteers. Youth volunteers may assist where there is less than a five-year age difference, and may serve as a third person in the room after a two unrelated certified adult requirement has been fulfilled.
5. Whenever possible, every room specifically designated for any organized activities involving children, youth and vulnerable adults should have a door with a window in it OR a half-door. "Windowless" doors should be kept open during organized activities.
6. "Roamers" may be used when necessary. A designated roamer will be present and visible during the worship and Sunday School hours to look into rooms where any organized activities occur, particularly when any of the above-listed guidelines are not possible.

### **Outside use of Wesley Church**

For other organizations/groups using Wesley UMC's facilities for children, youth or vulnerable adults activities (Boy Scouts, Girl Scouts, basketball teams, etc.): Any group wishing to use the Wesley UMC facilities for any activity involving children, youth and vulnerable adults must have an already-existing policy in place for Safe Sanctuaries (and be willing to share that with the Safe Sanctuaries Committee and/or the staff at Wesley Church) OR be willing to follow the Wesley Church policy. Any exceptions to the policy must be negotiated ahead of time with the Safe Sanctuaries Committee or staff at Wesley Church.

### **Vacation Bible School (VBS)**

Vacation Bible School requires numerous volunteers for just one week out of the year. Great effort will be given to involve as many certified leaders as possible, spreading these leaders out so that two are in each class or grouping. In addition, a one-time orientation or training for VBS helpers will be provided prior to the week of VBS. As a part of this, a segment will be devoted to Safe Sanctuaries overall safety guidelines.

### **Overnight Policies**

- All adults spending the night as chaperones must be certified by the Safe Sanctuaries Committee.
- The suggested adult/child ratio: one adult per every five children, youth and vulnerable adult; if a trip involves both genders, a male and female certified adult must be present.
- Each participating child, youth or vulnerable adult must have a submitted consent form signed by a parent/guardian prior to the overnight WITH an accompanying Medical Release form (App. E).
- If the overnight is a "sleepover," boys and girls will reside in separate rooms with appropriate number of adult chaperones and at least two unrelated adults in each room.
- If the overnight is in a motel, lodge or some other facility, adults will share rooms with adults only; children, youth and vulnerable adults will share rooms with children, youth and vulnerable adults only.
- All overnight functions (hosted or sponsored by the church) must be cleared by the Safe Sanctuaries Committee and shared with the Church Council.
- Any exceptions to the above must be approved by the Safe Sanctuaries Committee and reported to the Church Council.

### **Transportation Policies**

- All drivers of the church van must have a driver's license check and approval from the Safe Sanctuaries Committee and/or the Church Council.
- No drivers under the age of 21 will be used to transport children, youth or vulnerable adults, with the exception of an older sibling, if necessary; any driver age 21 or older would still fall under the five-year age span policy (with the exception of transporting vulnerable adults).
- All drivers of unrelated children, youth and vulnerable adults must have proper credentials in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania AND meet minimum state automobile insurance requirements.

- For “out of town” trips, all passengers of vehicles driven by unrelated adults must have submitted a consent form signed by a parent/guardian WITH an accompanying Medical Release form.
- All passengers should have a seat belt or proper restraint and the use of them should always be enforced.
- Where possible when multiple vehicles will be utilized, travel in a caravan.
- There should be adequate space for all passengers and for all luggage and equipment.
- If possible, all drivers should have access to a cell phone or some other way to communicate in the event of an emergency.
- Any exceptions to the above will be negotiated with the adult leaders of the event and/or The Safe Sanctuaries Committee.

### **Reporting Procedures**

- Upon receiving information of suspected abuse, the first step will be to ensure the protection of and tend to the immediate needs of the abused, as the situation requires.
- Upon receiving information of suspected abuse, the certified adult will IMMEDIATELY contact the Lead Pastor (or other assigned staff member in the lead pastor’s absence). The only exception to this is when an allegation is made against the Lead Pastor. In this instance, the certified adult will IMMEDIATELY contact the current Staff/Parish Relations Committee Chairperson.
- The volunteer/paid staff observing/receiving disclosure of alleged sexual/physical abuse will utilize (App. F) to document the alleged event. Then the volunteer/paid staff observing/receiving the information will contact the Senior Pastor (or other assigned staff member in the lead pastor’s absence) or the Chair of the Staff/Parish Relations Committee and will forward the information concerning the allegation when warranted to the Childline & Abuse Registry (1-800-932-0313).
- A second call should be placed to the District Superintendent, alerting him/her of the alleged abuse.
- If the alleged abuse happened on church property by a volunteer or staff member, that individual shall immediately be removed from contact with all children, youth and vulnerable adults until the incident reported has been resolved. This should be handled in a discreet manner and the alleged abuser should not be banned from other ministries of the church.
- The Media Director of the Central Pennsylvania Conference or his/her designee is the only person authorized to make statements to any representatives of the media. All requests for statements should be directed to the Senior Pastor (said assigned staff member or SPRC Chair) who will direct them accordingly.
- When alleged abuse has occurred, all helpful resources (local and through the Annual Conference) will be utilized to create a climate in which healing can take place.

The following areas of concern will be addressed under separate correspondence:

- Nursery
- Emergency Responses
- Incident Reports
- *Providing of photos/information on Website. Facebook/MySpace*