

Four Oaks United Methodist Church

Safe Sanctuary Policy

Introduction

The church is called upon to welcome and nurture children and youth in the Christian faith. Four Oaks United Methodist Church is committed to providing an environment in which they can feel secure and unthreatened from physical and emotional abuse. Therefore, we adopt this policy for the prevention of abuse of children and youth at Four Oaks United Methodist Church.

Theological Foundation

In April of 1996, the General Conference of the United Methodist Church adopted a resolution aimed at reducing the risk of child sexual abuse in the church. The adopted resolution includes the following statement:

Jesus said, “Whoever welcomes [a] child... welcomes me” (Matthew 18:5). Children are our present and our future, our hopes, 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, emotional and sexual exploitation and abuse” (P162C).

Tragically, churches haven’t 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, or pretend to be] occur in churches large and small, urban and rural. The problem cuts across all economic, cultural and racial lines. It is real, and it 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 churches and its leaders. Increasingly, churches are torn apart by the legal, emotional, and monetary consequences of litigation following allegations of child 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-2000*, pp. 180-181. Copyright 2000 by the United Methodist Publishing House. Used with permission.)

Statement of Commitment

Four Oaks United Methodist Church is committed to conducting our ministry so that children, youth and adults will be safe to grow spiritually. We further commit 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). We strive to fulfill this commitment to prevent abuse and neglect of our children and youth through preventive measures, reporting, education and training.

Purpose

Our congregation's purpose for establishing the Safe Sanctuary Policy and accompanying procedures is to demonstrate our absolute and unwavering commitment to the safety and spiritual growth of all people, especially our children and youth.

Policy Overview

The Safe Sanctuary Policy of FOUMC consists of three main parts: a preventive plan, a response plan and a driver's plan. The policy will be posted in visible areas throughout the church and distributed to any church members who wish to have a copy. It will also be issued to church leaders and volunteers as part of their annual training.

I. Preventive Policy-Preventing Abuse

1. Volunteer applications and background checks for those ages 18 and over will be conducted for all persons who volunteer as children and youth leaders or helpers. The safe sanctuary committee will be responsible for having the applications reviewed. Periodic updates and renewals will be conducted. Background checks will be performed when the volunteer is trained or when they turn 18. Volunteers will only need one background check unless there is an extended absence from FOUMC. If a volunteer has a conviction after being trained and certified, they need to inform the pastor or pastor parish chairperson. Occasional volunteers are exempt from the background check process. Occasional volunteers are defined as those who work with youth on an intermittent basis. Information from applications and background checks will be kept confidential and secured in a locked filing cabinet with limited access and usage.
2. Background Check Results – A person shall be excluded from volunteering with children and youth if any of the following results appear in his or her background check report:
 - a. A violent, abusive or sexually-related conviction of any kind ever in his or her lifetime
 - b. Any misdemeanor or felony conviction in the previous five years.
3. At least two adults will be present in each classroom or at each meeting or event involving children or youth. If it is not possible to have two adults present at all times, we will utilize an adult “roamer” to periodically monitor and supervise the gathering. It is preferable that the two adult volunteers be unrelated unless a third adult is present.
4. Volunteers in the ninth grade or older can be used as a second helper, as long as they are assisting someone who is at least five years older than themselves. Youth younger than high school age may be utilized as a third assistant. These guidelines apply until age 18.
5. No corporal punishment, verbal threats or intimidation will be allowed. Parents or guardians will be contacted if the need for discipline arises.
6. Six months or more of regular church attendance and a background check will be required before a person can apply as a volunteer to help with children or youth. Training for new volunteers will be conducted via an on-site training session at church.
7. Annual Renewals: Starting in 2016, an on-site training session will be mandatory for volunteers. On site trainings will then be provided every 4 years and will be mandatory for all volunteers. This means that all volunteers will do on-site training

- on those years (election years) regardless of when they were trained. During the interim years, all current volunteers must complete the renewal process by August 31 by signing the agreement form again.
8. On-site training will be available each spring for those who did not get trained with the rest of the volunteers. After this training, they will be placed on the same four-year cycle as the rest regardless of when they got certified.
 9. Training completed in May through August will be valid until August 31 of the following year. Training completed in September through April will be valid until August 31 of the current year.
 10. Overnight Rules – Youth lock-in chaperones must meet all screening criteria. Chaperones who wish to stay overnight at the event must be at least five years older than the youth and be members or active participants in the life of the church for at least 6 months.

II. Response Plan-Responding to and Reporting Suspected Abuse

In all instances of suspicion of child abuse the following procedures will be followed:

1. A timely report to the pastor of FOUMC or the chairperson of the Staff-Parish Committee will be made by someone with firsthand knowledge of the nature of the report.
2. Documentation of the alleged abuse will be made in the form of completing the Suspected Child Abuse Form within 24 hours of the incident or suspicion.
3. No member of the staff, paid or volunteer, shall conduct their own investigation or interview the child or other individuals pertaining to the suspicion.
4. No individual shall make any statement to the press. Such statements will be issued by the pastor or his or her representative only.
5. The Pastor of FOUMC or his or her representative will report the incident to the Johnston County Department of Social Services Abuse and Neglect Division. This notification will be made within 24-48 hours of the report.
6. If an allegation is made against a member of our congregation or a staff member, the pastor or the chairperson of the Staff-Parish Committee will notify the District Superintendent.

III. Driver's Plan

1. Drivers must be 21 years of age or older.
2. Drivers must be appropriately licensed and insured.
3. Drivers must undergo all screening and background checks.
4. Seat belts and child safety seats must be used at all times in accordance with North Carolina law.
5. Written permission will be required for all children and youth to attend functions away from church premises.