

SAFE SANCTUARIES POLICY
Reducing the Risk of Abuse in the Church
Revised 9/11/2019
Glossbrenner United Methodist Church

PREAMBLE

God has called us to make our ministries safe, protecting our children, youth, and developmentally challenged from abuse and exploitation. God has also called us to create communities of faith where these persons and their families can be safe and grow strong in their relationship with God and one another.

Jesus taught “Whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me,” (Mark 9:37 NRSV) and “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 NRSV)

The Social Principles of The United Methodist Church state “...children must be protected from economic, physical, and sexual exploitation and abuse.” (Par. 162(D) *2012 Book of Discipline*)

At each child’s baptism, we affirm our responsibility to their safety by our congregational response, pledging:

“With God’s help, we will so order our lives after the example of Christ that this child, surrounded by steadfast love, may be established in the faith, and confirmed and strengthened in the way that leads to life eternal.” (The Book of Worship, Baptismal Covenant, Congregational Pledge II)

Building on these foundations, we recognize that our faith calls us to offer hospitality and protection to all children, youth, and the developmentally challenged, as well as those who are committed to ministering to them as volunteers and employees. Every 15 seconds, a child is abused or neglected.

Often, abuse occurs in places where children feel safe – homes, schools, camps, and even churches. In over three quarters of reported cases, the victim was related to or acquainted with the abuser. In light of this, Glossbrenner UMC establishes this policy to help 1) prevent such abuse from happening in our churches; 2) make our churches places where children, youth, and developmentally challenged can feel safer in disclosing abuse; and 3) protect the loyal volunteers and employees who minister to them.

Although the following policy conforms to the standards set forth in the Safe Sanctuaries policy of the Eastern Pennsylvania Conference, we at Glossbrenner UMC accept responsibility to ensure that GUMC is in compliance with all aspects of the Pennsylvania Child Protective Services Law (63 PA. C.S.A. 6301). If that the law conflicts with this policy, the law shall control.

SCREENING AND SELECTION OF STAFF AND VOLUNTEERS:

Screening Standards:

All applicants for employment and/or volunteer service in which that applicant shall have contact with children in a manner which, under Pennsylvania law currently in force and as enacted and amended in the future from time to time, requires the person to obtain background clearances shall complete the following prior to start of service:

- 1) Written Application – a written application that shall include at least the following information:
 - a. Name
 - b. Address
 - c. Phone Number
 - d. Work/Volunteer History
 - e. Experience and skills related to the position
 - f. Two (2) personal, non-related references. Reference checks will be conducted by a designated member of SPRC, or the pastor, or the Director of Children and Youth Ministries.
- 2) Background Checks – All background checks required by the laws of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania currently in force and as enacted and amended from time to time.
- 3) Acceptance of Notice Requirement – complete the acceptance of notice requirement acknowledgment that they have been informed of and will comply with Pennsylvania law that requires them to inform the church in writing of any arrest, conviction or child abuse report that would prohibit them from working with children.
- 4) References – at least two references from persons not related to the applicant shall be obtained and contacted for all new applicants for employment or volunteer service.
- 5) Relationship with Church – All prospective volunteer workers with children shall have an active relationship with the local church for at least six months before being allowed to be in a supervisory role in activities for children or twenty-four months of good standing at their previous church. All requests for exceptions must be evaluated by the entire SPRC
- 6) Records – All written records shall be confidential and shall be kept in a secure location with access restricted to those with need to know. All files shall be maintained for three (3) years after service ends.

TRAINING:

All persons who have direct contact with children shall participate in training as required under the laws of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania currently in force and as enacted and amended in the future from time to time

SUPERVISION:

Supervision procedures are designed to reduce the possibility of abuse or exploitation of children, and to protect staff persons and volunteers from unfounded accusations.

On-Site

All on-site programs and ministries of the church shall use the following standards for the supervision of children.

- 1) The **two-adult rule** – Regardless of the size group, there will always be at least two adults present. This may include the presence of an adult ‘roamer’ who moves in and out of rooms/ministry activities.
- 2) No child will be left unsupervised while participating in a ministry activity/event.
- 3) All ministry activities should occur in open view. Each room or space or vehicle where ministry activities/events occur must be open to public view. For example: enclosed spaces such as classrooms shall have a viewing window, a glass panel in the door, a ½ door configuration or an open door.
- 4) No person shall supervise an age group unless he/she is at least 18 years of age or older and is at least 5 years older than the children being supervised.

Off-Site

Any church-related off-site event is considered an extension of church life, and therefore we commit to safeguard the safety of children and adults in the following ways:

- 1) Any church-run events held at an EPA Conference camp will abide by EPA Conference Standards. EPA conference camps expand the supervision standards beyond those required for accreditation by the American Camp Association, including the **“2-to-1 rule.” This means that 1 adult may be with 2 children, or 2 adults may be with 1 child, but 1 adult may never be with just 1 child.**
- 2) Ministry events involving transportation shall require a written consent form signed by the parent or guardian of the child. Any vehicles transporting minors shall strive to adhere to the “2-to-1 rule” at all times.
- 3) Off-site programs shall submit their organization’s Safe Sanctuaries policy to Glossbrenner UMC, to ensure alignment with the church’s policy, before any Glossbrenner UMC youth or volunteers participate in the activities. These programs include, but are not limited to:
 - REACH Work Camp or other youth mission organizations
 - Vacation Bible School programs or churches hosting VBS programs, with whom Glossbrenner UMC collaborates, shares responsibility, or endorses.

REPORTING:

Reporting of an allegation of child abuse is required whenever there is “reasonable cause to suspect” that abuse has occurred (PA Child Protective Services Law), Title 23 Pa. C.S.A. Chapter 6311(B)). Reasonable cause to suspect abuse can occur under any of the following circumstances:

- 1) The mandated reporter comes into contact with the child in the course of employment, occupation and practice of a profession or through a regularly scheduled program, activity or service.
- 2) The mandated reporter is directly responsible for the care, supervision, guidance or training of the child, or is affiliated with an agency, institution, organization, school, regularly established church or religious organization or other entity that is directly responsible for the care, supervision, guidance or training of the child.
- 3) A person makes a specific disclosure to the mandated reporter that an identifiable child is the victim of child abuse.
- 4) An individual 14 years of age or older makes a specific disclosure to the mandated reporter that the individual has committed child abuse.

It is not necessary for a mandated reporter to observe the child in order for the mandated reporter to have reasonable cause to make a report of suspected child abuse.

It is not necessary for a mandated reporter to identify the alleged perpetrator to have reasonable cause to make a report of suspected child abuse.

Failure of a mandated reporter to file a report of suspected child abuse may result in criminal penalties.

Reports of suspected child abuse are made to the **Pennsylvania Child Abuse Hotline (24-Hour service) at 1-800-932-0313**, or the PA Department of Human Services established electronic filing system. All volunteers and church employees are advised to put this hotline number in their cell phones.

The mandated reporter shall enjoy civil and criminal immunity. The mandated reporter is also entitled to an action against the employer if the reporter is terminated for making the report.

Persons other than a mandated reporter (permissive reporters) may make a report of child abuse, provided it is made in good faith and the reporter has reasonable cause to suspect a child is a victim of child abuse.

- 1) All mandated reporters shall immediately make a report to Childline any time they have reasonable cause to suspect that a child has been the victim of abuse.
- 2) Immediately after making the report to Childline, the mandated reporter shall inform the pastor that a report has been filed.
- 3) The pastor will then be responsible to facilitate the cooperation of the church with the investigation of the report by the authorities.
- 4) The mandated reporter shall provide a written report to the state using the CY-47 form available from the conference website or the PA Department of Human Service within 48 hours of the oral report and provide a copy of same to the pastor.
- 5) The EPA Conference iCare team will also assist with reporting.

The District Superintendent shall be notified if the alleged perpetrator is a staff person or volunteer of the church.

In the event that a member of the clergy becomes aware of suspected child abuse as a result of confidential communication which is protected under 42 PA C.S. 5943 (relating to confidential communications to clergymen), the conference legal counsel should immediately be consulted.

PASTORAL RESPONSES FOR REPORTS OF ALLEGATIONS OF ABUSE:

Any allegation of abuse requires a process to address responding to the victim, the alleged perpetrator, and the press. The response must be quick, compassionate and unified. All allegations will be taken seriously. Pastoral response is NOT an investigation of the alleged abuse. The investigation is the responsibility of public officials (child welfare and/or law

enforcement). In all cases of reported abuse there shall be cooperation with all official investigating agencies.

Response to victims of abuse:

In the instance of any allegation of abuse, there shall be a reaching out to the victim and the victim's family. Pastoral resources shall be extended, and the conference I-Care Team can be contacted to assist in providing this service. The care and safety of the victim shall be considered the first priority. Response to the victim and the victim's family shall be done in a positive and supportive manner.

The parents of the victim shall be notified, and steps shall be taken to address the safety and well being of the child until the parent(s) arrive. **NOTE:** If one or both of the parents is the alleged abuser, the direction of the child welfare authorities shall be followed concerning notification of others.

Response to all alleged perpetrators of abuse:

In the instance of an allegations of abuse there shall be a reaching out to the alleged perpetrator and the perpetrator's family. Pastoral resources shall be extended, and the conference I-Care Team can be contacted to assist in providing this service. Response to the alleged perpetrator and the perpetrator's family shall be done in a supportive way.

The alleged perpetrator shall immediately, yet with dignity and respect for their sacred worth, be removed from further involvement with children and advised that there has been an allegation of abuse. Details of the allegations of the abuse shall not be discussed with the alleged perpetrator at the time of removal. In any removal of a staff member or volunteer from any activity/ministry, care shall be taken to handle the removal in a discreet manner.

When it has been alleged that a member of the church staff or a volunteer, has committed an act of abuse, the staff member or volunteer shall be required to refrain from all ministry activities/events with children until the incident has been fully resolved by the appropriate state authorities and/or in accordance with the Book of Discipline.

At that time, a meeting shall be held with the employee or volunteer to discuss the incident(s) that led to the report being made. Even if the public agency determines the report to be unfounded, the church has the right to prohibit the volunteer or employee from resuming working in ministries with children based on the facts and circumstances available at that time.

Response to the Media:

In consultation with the presiding bishop, the District Superintendent, the Conference Director of Communications and pastor shall decide on a single spokesperson for contact with the public/media. All media requests for statements shall be directed to that spokesperson.

Compliance:

Compliance with this policy shall be a matter of record at each annual Charge Conference. Responsibility for compliance shall be a congregational responsibility, with joint leadership responsibility for compliance by the pastor(s), the designated SPRC member, and a permanent Safe Sanctuaries Committee.