

Pilmoor Memorial United Methodist Church
Safe Sanctuaries Policy
Child, Youth and Vulnerable Adult Abuse Prevention

INTRODUCTION

The General Conference of The United Methodist Church, in April 1996, 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 hope, 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 and sexual exploitation, and abuse."

Tragically, churches have not 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, both 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 in their 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 church and its leaders. Increasingly, churches are torn apart by the legal, emotional, and monetary consequences of litigation following allegations of 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 – 1996*. Copyright 1996 by The United Methodist Publishing House. Used by permission. [pp. 384-386]).

Thus, in covenant with all United Methodist congregations, we adopt this policy for the prevention of child abuse in our church.

PURPOSE

Our congregations' purpose for establishing this Child Abuse Prevention Policy and accompanying procedures is to demonstrate our absolute and unwavering commitment to the physical safety and spiritual growth of our congregation's children, youth and vulnerable adults.

STATEMENT OF COVENANT

Therefore, 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 of our children, youth and vulnerable adults as well as all of the paid staff and volunteers who work with children, youth and vulnerable adults. We will follow defined safety measures in the selection and recruitment of workers; we will implement prudent operational procedures in all programs and events; we will educate all those who work with children, youth and vulnerable adults regarding the required observance of all appropriate policies and methods (including first aid and methods of discipline); we will have a clearly defined procedure for reporting a suspected incident of abuse that conforms to the requirements of state law; and we will be prepared to respond to media inquiries if an incident occurs.

CONCLUSION

In all ministries with children, youth and vulnerable adults, this congregation is committed to demonstrating the love of Jesus Christ so that each child 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).

Pilmoor Memorial United Methodist Church

Procedures for Safe Ministries with Children, Youth and Vulnerable Adults

In order to provide safe and secure environment for our ministry participants, and to minimize the ministry's and paid staff and volunteer workers' vulnerability to unwarranted accusation, the following procedures have been adopted and will be strictly enforced.

1. At least two unrelated adults¹ should be present for each function and in each classroom or other enclosed area during any activity involving children², youth³ or vulnerable adults.⁴ When two adult workers are not available at all times in a room during church sponsored programs involving children, youth, or vulnerable adults, the interior door shall remain open unless there is an interior window allowing visibility into the room. Every effort should be made to ensure that at no time will a child, youth or vulnerable adult be alone with an unrelated adult.
2. The volunteers who will be present and assume primary responsibility for a church sponsored program involving children, youth or vulnerable adults, shall be at least 18 years old, Safe Sanctuaries trained and have a completed background check on file. During Sunday Worship and Sunday School, adult workers must be present, and be at least 18 years old. For church sponsored programs involving youth, the adult worker who will be present and assume primary responsibility shall be at least 21 years old.
3. All volunteers in Christian Education shall be a part of the Pilmoor Memorial United Methodist Church (PMUMC) family and attend worship consistently for at least six months.
4. All adult workers shall attend a Safe Sanctuaries orientation, agree to a background check, and have completed Safe Sanctuaries forms on file in the church office prior to their program involvement. All workers shall participate in a Safe Sanctuaries workshop at least once each year.
5. All volunteers will receive appropriate annual training on the policies and procedures associated with Safe Sanctuaries as defined by PMUMC and the NC United Methodist Conference.
6. All new volunteers will complete an initial volunteer information form before working with children, youth or vulnerable adults. ALL volunteers will complete an annual renewal form during each year of active service in ministries involving children, youth or vulnerable adults.
7. Any person, who may pose a threat to children or youth, as determined by the Staff-Parish Committee, will be prohibited from working with children and youth.

¹ For the purposes of this document, an “*adult*” is defined as a person over 18 years of age.

² For the purposes of this document, a “*child*” is defined as someone 18 years of age or younger.

³ For the purposes of this document, a “*youth*” is defined as someone between the ages of 13 and 18 and/or who is in middle or high school.

⁴ For the purposes of this document, a “*vulnerable adult*” is defined as any person who, because of physical or mental disability may be vulnerable to abuse.

8. To ensure children's safety, parents are expected to accompany preschool and elementary aged children into the building and to release them into the care of the adult leader of the program or activity. Children up to grade 5 will only be released from the event or classroom to a parent, guardian, or responsible relative with the parent's expressed permission. Children will not be released from a classroom or event to wait for transportation or to find a parent.
9. The parents of children and youth participating in church-sponsored programs will be given advance notice of all expected activities for those programs. Parents will be provided with advance notice of variations in usual schedules and activities.
10. Youth who participate in certain off-site (more than 50 miles one-way) or overnight activities are required to have a completed Emergency Medical Treatment Authorization on file, plus a parental permission slip specific to the event.
11. When transporting children, youth, or vulnerable adults age appropriate passenger restraints, per NC Laws, will be used. Volunteers who regularly transport children, youth or vulnerable adults should have a good driving record and must agree to a DMV check. Under no circumstances will one child be alone in a vehicle with an unrelated adult. At least two adults must provide oversight for any off site activity. Two unrelated adults must be in each vehicle for off site activities involving elementary age or younger children.
12. Discipline will be in accordance with the policy sheet "Discipline Procedures for Children's Ministries." There will be no use of corporal punishment, or techniques intended to humiliate or frighten any child.
13. In order to provide activities that are meaningful in a wholesome, orderly environment it is important for activities to be limited to the age group for which they are intended.
14. When volunteers or staff are required to change diapers, they shall do so in an open area.
15. When a preschooler is being supervised in the restroom, the restroom door should be left open, even if just slightly, If a "potty" accident occurs which requires the assistance of an adult, a second adult must be nearby during the clean-up and a parent should be informed.
16. Each year, the congregation will be informed of these Safe Sanctuaries policies and procedures and any changes made to them.
17. All persons or groups that use church property must commit to uphold these policies and procedures.
18. The Staff-Parish Committee will have authority and final say as to staffing of volunteers, as well as dismissal if necessary.
19. Reporting Suspected Abuse: Suspected incidents of child abuse must be reported in accordance with North Carolina law, which states anyone who suspects or learns of an incident of child abuse or neglect must report such to the Department of Social Services or Law Enforcement immediately. Such reports may be made confidentially. In addition, any suspected incident of child abuse which occurs on-site, during an off-site activity, or involves church personnel or volunteers should also be reported as soon as possible to the Sr. Pastor or the chair of the Staff Parish Relations Committee.

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Discipline Procedures for Children's Ministries

Pilmoor UMC's Children's Ministries takes a positive approach to discipline based on the Christian principle, "So in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you, for this sums up the Law and the Prophets." (Matt. 7:12)

Classroom teachers/leaders can facilitate the development of responsibility, self-regulation and self-control in children by:

- Setting clear, consistent and fair limits for classroom behavior.
- Encouraging appropriate behavior, patiently reminding children of rules and their rationale as needed.
- Using children's mistakes as learning opportunities.
- Anticipating and eliminating potential problems.
- Redirecting children to a more acceptable behavior or activity.
- Deflecting problems before they become conflicts.
- Modeling appropriate and acceptable behavior.
- Listening and acknowledging the feelings and frustrations of children with respect.

There will be no use of corporal punishment, or techniques intended to humiliate or frighten any child.

Time-outs are discouraged because children need to learn to work out their problems, not be isolated from them.

Food or beverage is never withheld as a discipline device.

If discipline issues become common for a child, the volunteer should request a conference with the parent and the program staff responsible for the particular ministry.

Pilmoor Memorial United Methodist Church

Participation Covenant Statement for Persons
Working with Children, Youth and Vulnerable Adults

The congregation of Pilmoor Memorial United Methodist Church is committed to providing a safe and secure environment for all children, youth, and vulnerable adults, as well as the volunteers and staff who participate in ministries and activities sponsored by the church. The following policy statements reflect our congregation's commitment to preserving this church as a holy place of safety and protection for all who would enter and as a place in which all people can experience the love of God through relationships with others.

1. No adult who has been convicted of child abuse (either sexual abuse, physical abuse, or emotional abuse) should volunteer to work with children, youth or vulnerable adults in any church-sponsored activity.
2. Volunteers who may have questions or concerns regarding their ability or suitability for a particular area of ministry (including physical limitations, temperament, or a personal history of abuse) are encouraged to discuss these concerns with the pastor or chair or the Staff-Parish Relations Committee.
3. All adult volunteers involved with children, youth or vulnerable adults of our church are expected to be regular participants of Pilmoor during their ministry.
4. Adult volunteers with children, youth and vulnerable adults shall observe all church policies regarding children's, youth and adult ministries.
5. Adult volunteers with children, youth and vulnerable adults shall have a completed Screening Form and background check, attend a Safe Sanctuaries training and other regular training and educational events provided by the church to keep volunteers informed of church policies and state laws regarding child abuse.
6. Adult volunteers shall immediately report any behavior that seems abusive or inappropriate to the pastor or the chair of the Staff-Parish Relations Committee (SPRC).

Please answer each of the following questions:

As a volunteer in this congregation, do you agree to complete the screening form, background check and to participate in training and education events provided by the church related to your volunteer assignment?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	No <input type="checkbox"/>
As a volunteer in this congregation, do you agree to promptly report abusive or inappropriate behavior to the pastor or the Chair of the SPRC?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	No <input type="checkbox"/>
As a volunteer in this congregation, do you agree to observe and abide by all church policies regarding working in ministries with children, youth and vulnerable adults?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	No <input type="checkbox"/>
As a volunteer in this congregation, do you agree to inform the minister of this congregation if you have ever been convicted of child abuse?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	No <input type="checkbox"/>
Have you ever been convicted of child abuse?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	No <input type="checkbox"/>

I have read this **Participation Covenant**, and agree to observe and abide by the policies set forth above.

Signature of Applicant

Date

Print full name

After the volunteer has signed this document, make a copy of both sides, give one copy to the volunteer and place the original in their Safe Sanctuaries file.

Safe Sanctuaries Policy and Procedures
Annual Renewal Form

I have already completed and signed a Safe Sanctuaries Volunteer application and have submitted it to the church office. With this signature I agree that I have read over the policy again and accept the policy and procedures as stated on this day.

Signature

Date

Signature

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