

Cornerstone Church
SAFE SANCTUARIES POLICY
Approved November 2009

Introduction

The General Conference of The United Methodist Church, beginning 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.” (Paragraph 162C)

Tragically, churches have not always been safe places for children. Child sexual abuse, exploitation and ritual abuse 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 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 – 2004*: copyright 2004 by The United Methodist Publishing House, pp. 201-202)

Purpose

Therefore, in covenant with all United Methodist congregations and the Alabama-West Florida Annual Conference, Cornerstone Church adopts this policy and its accompanying procedures to demonstrate our absolute and unwavering commitment to the physical safety and spiritual growth of all our children, youth, senior citizens, and at-risk adults. This policy also serves to protect paid staff and volunteers from false allegations of abuse and to limit the extent of legal liability of Cornerstone Church.

Statement of Covenant

As a Christian community of faith committed to ministry to and with children, we pledge to conduct all of our activities and ministries in such a way that assures the safety and spiritual growth of all children and youth entrusted to us. In all of our ministries with children and youth we are committed to demonstrating the love of Jesus so that each person will be “...surrounded

by steadfast love, ... established in faith and confirmed and strengthened in the way that leads to eternal life” (“Baptismal Covenant II,” United Methodist Hymnal, p. 44).

Procedures

Our congregation adheres to the following comprehensive safe sanctuaries plan as for all ministries involving children and youth.

RECRUITING, SCREENING, AND TRAINING

Recruiting and screening volunteer and paid staff

- A. All persons employed or volunteering as an authority figure for children/youth shall:
1. Complete Application/Commitment Form.
 2. Provide three character references.
 3. Be interviewed by the director of the ministry or program.
 4. Consent to the following background checks:
 - a. Multi-state criminal and sexual offender check based on social security number or
 - b. Alabama Department of Human Resources Child Abuse/Neglect Central Registry Clearance.
 - b. Motor vehicle records (for those who will be transporting children, youth, or at-risk adults).
 5. Demonstrate an active relationship with the local church for at least 6 months.
 6. Have the experience and qualifications for the position.
 7. Complete safe sanctuaries training.
- B. All persons employed or volunteering as an assistant for children/youth shall:
1. Complete an Application/Commitment Form.
 2. Be interviewed by the director of the ministry or program.
 3. Provide three character references.
 4. Consent to the following background checks:
 - a. Multi-state criminal and sexual offender check based on social security number or
 - b. Alabama Department of Human Resources Child Abuse/Neglect Central Registry Clearance.
 - c. Motor vehicle records (for those who will be transporting children, youth or at-risk adults).
 5. Complete safe sanctuaries training upon hiring and annual updates.
- C. In the event a substitute worker needs to be brought in under last minute circumstances, every reasonable effort will be made to ensure that person that person:

1. Completes an Application/Commitment form.
2. Provides a character reference who can be contacted immediately by the director.
3. Completes a basic orientation/training provided by the director or other supervisor before working.
4. Consents to the following background check:
 - a. Multi-state criminal and sexual offender check based on social security number or
 - b. Alabama Department of Human Resources Child Abuse/Neglect Central Registry Clearance.

Training staff and volunteers

Cornerstone Church will ensure that on-going training focused on current issues of child protection is available to and received by those working with children and youth. Participation in safe sanctuaries training will be required of all paid staff members and adult volunteers who work with children and/or youth. Attendance records will be maintained.

SUPERVISION

Minimum age

The following standards for authority figures (whether volunteers or staff) are designed to separate authority figures from the group they are serving by age or enough years to reinforce recognition of the authority figure's role.

1. Authority figures – defined as the primary leaders of youth and children's activities
 - a. To work with youth (grades six and above), or children, (infants –fifth grade) the authority figure must be a minimum of age 19 and it is recommended they are at least four years older than the youth involved.
 - b. To work with children (infants-fifth grade), the authority figure must be a minimum of age 18.
2. Assistants – defined as persons who lend aid to the authority figure and act at the direction of the authority figure, including volunteers, interns, and camp counselors. Whether working with youth or children, assistants must be:
 - a. A minimum of 12 years of age and four years older than the participants, and
 - b. In the judgment of a staff member, competent to assist in the activity.
 - c. An assistant less than 17 years of age may not be counted as an adult in the child/ adult ratios.
 - d. An assistant must lend aid with at least two authority figures present.

Two adult rule

A minimum of two non-related adults will be utilized in all programming with children, youth, and at-risk adults. When it is impossible to staff with two non-related adults, there must be an additional adult serving as a floater with visual and physical access to all areas.

Open-door policy

Classrooms or childcare rooms should be open to visitation at any time without prior notice by staff, parents, or other volunteers.

Check-in and check-out procedures

Check-in and check-out procedures will be utilized for all programs with children and youth. This includes the children and youth participating in church activities as well as all staff and volunteers.

Six month rule

All volunteers serving as an authority figure will demonstrate an active relationship in good standing in a local congregation or other congregation for a minimum of six months. Persons not meeting this minimum requirement may serve only in an assistant capacity with two other non-related adults.

Adult/Child ratios

All ratios must be understood in light of first having two adults present at all times. Adults and authority figures will never be alone with a child or youth. This can include, but is not limited to an automobile while taking a young person home, a classroom with windowless or locked doors, or a cabin at camp.

Alabama State Codes for child care ratios:

- Birth to 18 months – 1 Adult to 5 Children
- 18 months to 2 ½ years of age – 1 Adult to 7 Children
- 24 months to 36 months of age – 1 Adult to 8 Children
- 2 ½ year to 4 years of age – 1 Adult to 11 Children
- 4 years of age to school age – 1 Adult to 18 Children
- School age to 8 years of age – 1 Adult to 21 Children
- 8 years of age and older – 1 Adult to 28 Children

Participants who are physically or mentally impaired:

- Those needing constant and individual assistance or supervision – 1 leader to 1 participant
- Those needing close, but not constant, assistance or supervision – 1 leader to 2 participants
- Those needing occasional assistance – 1 leader to 4 participants
- Those needing minimal assistance – 1 leader to 5 participants

Overnight programs

Overnight events include summer camps, retreats, mission trips, lock-ins, or any event that extends through the evening. The adults staying with the young people must always be the same

gender as the young people. The adults must never share a bed with a young person and should not be alone in the room with a young person at any time.

- Grades 1-3 – 1 adult to 8 young people
- Grades 4-8 – 1 adult to 10 young people
- Grades 9-12 – 1 adult to 12 young people

Motel/hotel settings

- A hotel will be selected that has rooms opening to the interior (i.e. closed hallway) of the building. Where possible, select adjoining rooms on a single hallway.
- When two adults cannot be assigned to a room housing youth, the youth will be roomed separately from the adults. If adjoining rooms are available with doors that can be left in the open position, a single adult in each of the adjoining rooms is acceptable.
- An adult will not share a bed with a young person.
- Where adults need to be assigned to separate rooms, one adult room be located between every two youth rooms on the hall.
- Adults will develop a rotating schedule allowing for the hallways to be monitored throughout the night.
- If room checks are needed, they will involve two adults of the same gender as the room residents.

Transportation

- All drivers will be screened including a review of their motor vehicle record.
- When private vehicles are used to transport young people for programmed church-related events, leaders will ensure that appropriate insurance is being maintained by both the church and the private driver.
- All drivers must be 21 years of age or older.
- Where possible, it is recommended that two adults be placed in each vehicle or the vehicles teamed in minimum groups of two that stay together at all times.
- On all planned trips, a signed permission slip with medical authorization should be on file. In the absence of such a form, the child will not be able to participate and an adult will call a parent or relative to pick up the child.

Mentoring

Mentoring programs will follow these guidelines:

- Provide screening and background checks for all adults who will be working with children and youth.
- Establish clear written guidelines for settings, boundaries, and the environment where the mentoring will occur.
- Providing training for all adults (or youth, if they will be working with children) who are interested in being mentors.
- Make it clear that all persons are expected to following congregation and conference guidelines for reducing the risk of abuse.
- Outings will be in public places with routes and time frames agreed upon in advance, and known to all. Outings with several mentors and young people are preferred.

- One-to-one mentoring or tutoring will take place in a group setting, such as one large room rather than individual rooms spread throughout the church building.

Counseling

At any counseling session with children, youth, or adults of the opposite gender, any non-windowed door of the room used should remain open for the entire session. Ideally, the session will be conducted at a time when others are nearby, even if they are not within listening distance. A counseling session will never be held in secret, even if the person being counseled makes that request. Whenever someone seeks counseling, it is important to determine in the initial meeting if the counselor is actually qualified to address the needs effectively. If not, the person will be referred to another counselor.

Interpersonal boundaries

Adult workers with youth and children must be attentive to:

- Appropriate dress codes
- Appropriate use of language
- Appropriate demonstrations of affection and encouragement. (i.e. an adult leader should never initiate a hug and should always be the one to end the hug.)

Home visitation

When visiting a young person in their home, the two non-related adult rule still applies. If a young person drops by the home of an adult volunteer or staff person, the visit should be conducted in the front yard or moved to a local restaurant.

Non-church programs

Non-church programs i.e., boys scouts, shall maintain their own personnel files. Cornerstone Church reserves the right to obtain an explanation of non-local church's record keeping process and upon written request of the church administrator to be given copies of documents applicable to programs conducted at Cornerstone.

Break in service

Persons who have a break of one or more years shall submit to screening procedure. We reserve the right to repeat background checks of persons at any time.

Record Keeping

All forms and reference reports shall be kept as part of an applicant's confidential personnel file. All applications and related forms must be completed.

REPORTING & RESPONSE

Unfavorable background checks or refusal to submit to a background check

1. Volunteers or Staff (other than clergy):
 - a. The person shall be notified with a “Notice of unfavorable background check” form.
 - b. The Pastor and Pastor Parish Chairperson shall meet with the person to discuss the report.
 - c. Review process may consider the following factors:
 - 1) The nature and seriousness of the crime
 - 2) The relationship of the crime to the purpose of the congregation
 - 3) The age of the person at the time of the commission of the crime
 - 4) The time elapsed since the person’s crime
 - 5) Any charge that deals with sexual abuse or child abuse shall prevent the person from working with children and/or youth.
 - d. Documentation of action taken should be placed in the person’s file.
2. Clergy Persons:
 - a. The District Superintendent shall send a “Notice of unfavorable background check” form to the clergy person.
 - b. The District Superintendent and clergy shall meet to review the report.
 - c. The District Superintendent shall follow disciplinary guidelines in handling the report.
 - d. A letter shall be placed in the clergy’s personnel file reporting the action taken.

Reporting abuse or alleged abuse in Alabama

Alabama’s mandatory child abuse and neglect reporting law states that all school teachers and officials, social workers, day care workers or employees, mental health professionals, members of the clergy as defined in Rule 505 of the Alabama Rules of Evidence, or any other person called upon to render aid or medical assistance to any child, when the child is known or suspected to be a victim of child abuse or neglect, shall be required to report, or cause a report to be made of the same, orally, either by telephone or direct communication immediately, followed by a written report, to a duly constituted authority (law enforcement official or Department of Human Resources, 373-1100) . When an initial report is made to a law enforcement official, the official subsequently shall inform the Department of Human Resources of the report so that the department can carry out its responsibility to provide protective services when deemed appropriate to the respective child or children.

Cornerstone Church Reporting of abuse or alleged abuse

Once an allegation of child abuse is made:

1. The staff person, ministry leader or volunteer who observes alleged abuse or to whom such abuse is reported is required to report the incident immediately to the staff person in charge of the children’s activity (youth pastor, director of elementary ministries, director of early childhood ministries, mom’s morning out director). In the event an allegation is made against one of these individuals, the church pastor and administrator will be contacted.
2. The ministry director will immediately obtain necessary information including victim’s name and family information and complete an incident report. Parents will be notified immediately.

3. The pastor and church administrator will be informed immediately following an allegation of abuse.
4. The church leadership will report any incidences to local law enforcement officials.
5. Any person who is the object of the report will refrain from all children's activities until the incident reported is resolved. This shall be handled in a discreet manner and confidentiality of all individuals involved will be maintained.
6. A quick, compassionate and unified response to an alleged incident of abuse is expected. All allegations will be taken seriously. In all cases of reported or observed abuse in a children's activity, the entire staff of that activity shall be at the service of all official investigating agencies.