

Safe Sanctuary Policy
Hampton United Methodist Church
10 West Main Street
Hampton, GA 30228

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, emotional and sexual exploitation and abuse” (The Book of Discipline of the United Methodist Church--2016; ¶ 162C).

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, 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. (Adapted from “The Book of Resolutions of The United Methodist Church--2016, pp.182-183. Copyright © 2016 by The United Methodist Publishing House. Used by permission.)

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

Purpose

Our congregation's purpose for establishing this Safe Sanctuary Policy and accompanying procedures is to demonstrate our absolute and unwavering commitment to the physical safety and spiritual growth of all our 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 our children, youth, and vulnerable adults, as well as all the workers with the children, youth, and vulnerable adults. We will follow reasonable safety measures in the selection and recruitment of workers, staff and volunteers; we will implement prudent operational procedures in all programs and events; we will educate our workers with children, youth, and vulnerable adults regarding the use 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 our ministries with children, youth, and vulnerable people this congregation is committed to demonstrating the love of Jesus Christ so each child/youth/vulnerable adult 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.)

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Know your state's law for specific wording and definition of what constitutes abuse to children and youth. Abuse may include:

Physical Abuse

Abuse in which a person deliberately and intentionally causes bodily harm to a child. Examples may include violent battery with a weapon (knife, belt, strap, and so forth), burning, shaking, kicking, choking, fracturing bones, and any of a wide variety of non-accidental injuries. (from Safe Sanctuaries for Youth, page 15)

Emotional Abuse

This is abuse in which a person exposes a youth or younger child to spoken and/or unspoken violence or emotional cruelty. Emotional abuse sends a message to the youth or child that they are worthless, bad, unloved, and undeserving of love and care. Children exposed to emotional abuse may have experienced being deprived of any sign of parental affection, being locked in a closet or other confining spaces, being incessantly told they are bad, or being forced to abuse alcohol or drugs. This type of abuse is difficult to prove, reports of neglect from teenagers or children should not be ignored. (from Safe Sanctuaries for Youth, page 15)

Neglect

This is abuse in which a person endangers a youth's or child's health, welfare, or safety through negligence. It may include withholding food, medical care, and even education to destroy the youth's or child's sense of self-esteem and self-worth. Neglect may well be the most common form of abuse. Although it is often difficult to prove, reports of neglect from teenagers or children should not be ignored. (from Safe Sanctuaries for Youth, page 16)

Sexual Abuse

This type of abuse occurs when sexual contact between a youth, child and an adult (or another older and more powerful youth) happens. The youth or child victim is not capable of consenting to such contact or resisting such sexual acts. Often, the youth or child victim is physically dependent on the perpetrator (for example, a parent). Additionally, the youth victim is often psychologically dependent on the perpetrator (for example, a teacher or a youth minister). Examples of sexual abuse include fondling, intercourse, incest, and the exploitation of and exposure to child pornography and/or prostitution. (from Safe Sanctuaries for Youth, page 16)

Ritual Abuse

This is abuse in which physical, sexual, or psychological violence is inflicted on a youth intentionally, and in a stylized way by someone (or multiple people) with responsibility for the victim's welfare. Typically, the perpetrator appeals to some higher authority or power to justify his or her abuses. Examples of ritual abuse may include cruel treatment of animals or repetitious threats of sexual or physical violence to the youth or child victim or to people related to the youth or child victim. When reports of ritual abuse are made, they are often extremely horrifying. Such reports may even seem too gruesome to be true. However, any youth or child making such a report must not be ignored. (from Safe Sanctuaries for Youth, page 16)

Hampton UMC Safe Sanctuary Policy Reporting Plan

Effective 1-1-2010

If a HUMC ministry coordinator has witnessed, been told about, or suspects a case of Child, Youth, or Vulnerable Adult abuse, the following steps will take place **as soon as possible**:

1. **If the situation is currently happening**, take every reasonable effort to immediately separate the one being abused from the abuser (call the police by dialing 911 if the immediate threat remains.) Removing people from immediate danger is the first priority. Then go to step #2.
2. **If the situation is not currently happening**, the ministry coordinator discusses the event with the Pastor who fills out the HUMC Incident Report Form for the Trustees records. The Pastor informs the SPRC Chairperson and the Trustee Chair of the incident. If the allegation is against the Pastor, the ministry coordinator goes directly to the SPRC Chairperson who fills out the Incident Report Form and contacts the Trustee Chair.
3. The Pastor (or SPRC Chair if the allegation is against the Pastor) calls the Department of Family and Children Services (DFACS's) in the county where the child or vulnerable adult lives (if known) **DFACS Web Site: <https://dfcs.georgia.gov/> or call 1.855.GACHILD (1 855-422-4453).**
4. **Let DFACS handle things from there.** The person suspected of abuse should not be informed for the call made to DFACS. It is up to DFACS to do the investigation. The victim should not be asked for more details by Church staff.
5. After a report to DFACS has been made, **the following should happen co-currently**:
 - The Pastor (or SPR Chair if the allegation was against the Pastor) informs the District Superintendent that a call has been made to DFACS.
 - The Trustee Chair calls the Hampton UMC Insurance carrier (which automatically prompts their legal counsel resources.)
6. The Pastor in consultation with the Trustee Chair, SPRC Chair, Lay Leader, and Church Council Chair decides what needs to be communicated to the Congregation (exclude anyone from the list if they are involved in the allegation.)
7. All media inquiries must be directed to the Pastor (or District Superintendent if the allegation is against the Pastor.)
8. Pray without ceasing for all involved.