

**Wesley Monumental United Methodist Church
Safe Sanctuaries Policies and Procedures**

I Introduction

The General Conference of The United Methodist Church has 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 devastation 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 litigations 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— 2012, page 240.]

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

II Purpose

The purpose of this policy is to help the Wesley Monumental United Methodist Church provide a caring and safe environment for children and youth, and the adults involved in ministering to such persons in all phases of the Church's life. We express our unwavering commitment to the physical safety and spiritual growth of all of our children and youth.

III 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 and youth as well as all of the workers with children and youth. We will follow reasonable measures in the selection and recruitment of workers; we will implement prudent operational procedures in all programs and events; we will educate all of our workers with children and youth regarding the use of all appropriate policies and methods (first aid training will be taught where applicable); 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.

IV Types of Child Abuse

A. Definition

Child abuse refers to an act committed by a parent, caregiver or person in a position of trust (even though he/she may not care for the child on a daily basis) which is not accidental and which harms or threatens to harm a child's physical or mental health or a child's/youth's welfare.

- B. Types of Abuse
1. Physical Abuse
Abuse in which a person deliberately and intentionally causes bodily harm to a child/youth.
Examples: violent battery with a weapon, burning, shaking, kicking, choking
 2. Emotional Abuse
Abuse in which a person exposes a child or youth to spoken and/or unspoken violence or emotional cruelty. Emotional abuse sends a message to the child/youth of worthlessness, badness, and being not only unloved, but undeserving of love and care.
Examples: confinement, as in a closet, inadequate nurturance, extreme discipline, knowingly permitting such behavior as drug or alcohol abuse.
 3. Neglect
Abuse in which a person endangers a child's health, safety, or welfare through negligence.
Examples: withholding food, clothing, medical attention, education, or even affection and affirmation of child's/youth's self-worth.
 4. Sexual Abuse
Abuse in which sexual contact between a child and an adult [or another older or more powerful youth] occurs. The child is never truly capable of consenting to or resisting such contact and/or such sexual acts.
 5. Ritual Abuse
Abuse in which physical, sexual, or psychological violations of a child are inflicted regularly, intentionally, and in a stylized way by a person, or persons, responsible for a child's or youth's welfare.

V. Reducing the Risk of Child/Youth Abuse: Policies and Procedures

In an effort to create the safest possible environment within Wesley Monumental United Methodist Church, several prevention measures and minimum supervisory standards will be utilized to reduce the possibility of abuse to children and youth and to protect Staff and Volunteers from unwarranted accusations. These measures include screening of paid and volunteer workers for past child abuse convictions, provision for regular training on child abuse issues to paid and volunteer worker, use of the two adult worker rule, standards of appropriate classroom discipline, and open classrooms. These guidelines are further defined in **Exhibit 1** to this policy.

Minimum Supervisory Standards require:

- A. Two Adult Rule: No fewer than two certified, non-related adults (who have passed the screening process) should provide supervision at all times during any activities for children and youth. A Staff Member will frequently observe all children and youth classes at unscheduled times. Invited guests who are not screened do not count as part of the two adult rule.
- B. First Aid and CPR Training
Current first aid and CPR certificates are required for the paid Staff who work with children and youth. Classes will be provided to encourage Volunteers who work with children and youth to become First Aid and CPR certified. Attendance can be coordinated in conjunction with Eli's Place training in the Fall and must be completed by the 1 year anniversary of employment.
- C. Annual Training for Paid Staff and Volunteers
An annual training will be held for all workers with children and youth, paid and volunteer, at Wesley Monumental UMC. This training will include the church's policies for the prevention of child abuse, procedures to be used in all ministries with children and youth, appropriate steps to report an incident of child abuse, and details of state laws regarding child abuse. This will also be the time at which workers sign or renew their covenant to abide by and cooperate with the church's policies and procedures. Youth who help with children's ministries will be required to attend annual orientation and sign a covenant.
- D. Five Year Older Rule
No adult (age 19 or older) shall supervise an age group unless he/she is at least 5 years older than the children or youth with whom he/she is working.

- E. **Age Requirements for Workers**
Persons under the age of 19 will not be the primary leader of any class or group of children or youth. Persons under the age of 19 cannot be expected to have developed the maturity and judgment that is needed to be fully responsible for younger children. Youth may serve as assistants but cannot count as one of the two adult workers.
- F. **Open Classrooms**
To the extent possible, windows will be included in classroom doors. If no windows exist on the doors, then the classroom door should be kept open during any session. Staff Members will be used to observe classrooms at irregular time intervals. Classrooms may be visited at any time without prior notice by church staff, parents, and other volunteer church workers.
- G. **One on One Counseling, Meeting, or Training**
One on one counseling, meeting or training with children and youth will be done only while others are present in the same building. Counseling will be done in a room with a window in the door and the door unlocked.
- H. **Notification to Parents**
Full information will be provided to parents regarding the event(s) held away from church property in which their children or youth will be participating.
- I. **Six Month Rule**
Wesley Monumental UMC will not utilize a worker for children or youth ministries unless such person has had continuous active involvement or been a member of this church [full, affiliate, or associate] for at least six months or upon approval of the Safe Sanctuaries Committee. This rule does not apply to paid staff. All persons must participate in annual training and screening process.
- J. **Staff and Volunteer Screening**
Before beginning the first year of service, each employee or volunteer worker in children's or youth ministries will be asked to sign the Safe Sanctuaries Policies and Procedures Acknowledgement, fill out the Volunteer Application form, and sign the Acknowledgement and Authorization for Background Investigation form allowing a check of past criminal history and allegations of criminal history. A criminal background check will include a local (county), state and national search of the applicant's criminal record. An application and criminal background check will be required of each worker. Within twelve (12) months of adoption of this policy, all existing workers with youth and children will comply with this paragraph in order to continue their positions. References will be required for all paid workers and may be requested for volunteers.
- All records from criminal background checks will be examined by one of the following: 1) Director of Children's Ministry, Director of Student Ministry, the Lay Leader, and 2) a member of the Safe Sanctuaries Committee. These two persons will refer concerns and/or adverse reports to the Senior Minister. All information gained through the screening process will be strictly confidential and kept in locked cabinet.
- All criminal background checks will be updated every 3 years unless a volunteer or paid staff leaves the congregation and returns to the life of the church in which case a new criminal background check will be required.
- K. **Community Groups**
Leaders of community groups of children or youth who use the church facilities are required to read the policy and sign the Safe Sanctuaries Policies and Procedures Acknowledgement form. Church facilities will not be available to groups whose leaders refuse to read and sign the policy.
- L. **Transportation:**
A Driving Record Check will be requested on anyone who transports children or youth for programs, activities and events sponsored by WMUMC. See Exhibit 1 for further requirements.

VI Reporting Child Abuse

Should there be an allegation of child abuse at Wesley Monumental United Methodist Church, the following procedures shall be followed:

- A. If urgent, call 911 immediately.
- B. Any allegation of child abuse shall be treated as serious.
- C. Immediately notify the Senior Pastor, Director of Children's Ministry, and/or Director of Youth Ministry who will:
 1. Begin documenting all steps taken in handling the allegation of child abuse.
 2. Immediately notify the District Superintendent and Bishop.
- D. The witness of the alleged abuse shall make a report to the Child Protection Unit of the Department of Family and Children Services (DFCS) within 24 hours. Staff member(s) shall assist as necessary.
 1. **Mandatory Reporters:** The State of Georgia states that persons employed by or volunteering with children have a legal obligation to report abuse or they will face criminal liability for failing to report suspected child abuse. Strict confidentiality is upheld by DFCS and immunity is granted to those reporting in "good faith". The penalty for knowingly and willfully failing to report carries a misdemeanor charge. The law clearly instructs that we must report any issue that is brought to our attention. Once a volunteer or staff has followed the protocol in church policy, the obligation as a mandatory reporter has been fulfilled.
- E. Do not confront the accused but do remove them from any further involvement with children or youth until the allegation is investigated.
- F. The pastors should extend care and pastoral support to those impacted by the allegations but should NOT attempt to investigate the allegation.
- G. Observe confidentiality for both the alleged victim and the accused until advised to the contrary by an attorney.
- H. There will be a single spokesperson for the church, who will be designated by the Safe Sanctuaries Committee. No one, including the spokesperson, shall speak to the media without consulting with the Conference Director of Communications.
- I. The church will cooperate fully with the investigation.

VII. Policy Review

The Safe Sanctuaries Policies and Procedures of Wesley Monumental United Methodist Church shall be reviewed annually by the Safe Sanctuaries Committee. A report of the review will be submitted to the Administrative Board at the Annual Charge Conference. Revisions would have to be approved by the Administrative Board.

VIII. Safe Sanctuaries Committee Appointments

A Safe Sanctuaries Committee will be appointed by the Nominating Committee. The committee will consist of a number of persons decided by the Administrative Board, which shall include at a minimum the Senior Pastor, Lay Leader, Member of the Trustees Board, Member of the Staff Parish Relations Committee, a Selected Chairperson, Director of Children's Ministry, and Director of Student Ministry. The members of the committee will normally serve terms of 3 years on a rotating basis. Initially, the first class will serve one year, the second class two years, and the third class three years, in order to establish this pattern. The committee will consist of three classes with a new class appointed each year. Each class will serve a term of three years. Persons must be off the committee at least one year before they may be appointed to a new class.

**Wesley Monumental United Methodist Church
Safe Sanctuaries Policies and Procedures
Acknowledgement**

RETURN TO

Wesley Monumental United Methodist Church
429 Abercorn Street
Savannah, GA 31401

After reviewing the foregoing Policies and Procedures, please sign, date, detach, and return this portion to indicate that you have read, understood, and accept the Safe Sanctuaries Policies and Procedures and Exhibit 1 of Wesley Monumental United Methodist Church.

Name _____

Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Phone _____

I have read and understand the Safe Sanctuaries Policies and Procedures of Wesley Monumental United Methodist Church. I agree to abide by those policies and procedures. I have no arrests or convictions for a crime under state or federal law [excluding minor traffic offenses] or expungement of such convictions that I have not previously disclosed on the volunteer application. I authorize and release any job, personal or church references, which I might provide to Wesley Monumental United Methodist Church, to give the Church any information (including opinions) that they may have regarding my work with children and/or youth.

Signature

Date