

Concord United Methodist Church

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I. Introduction

As a Christian community of faith, we pledge to conduct the ministry of the gospel in ways that assure the safety and spiritual growth of all children, youth and vulnerable adults as well as those who serve in ministry with and to them. As such:

- We will follow reasonable safety measures in the screening and selection of leadership, both paid and volunteer.
- We will implement prudent operational procedures in all programs, events and ministries.
- We will educate all our leadership—both paid and volunteer—with children, youth and vulnerable adults regarding the use of all appropriate policies and methods.
- We will have a clearly defined procedure to reporting an observed or 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.

Nothing in this policy or procedure is designed to hinder or prevent the investigation of suspected, reported or confirmed violations of any North Carolina criminal laws.

II. Theological Rationale

Jesus said, “Whoever welcomes a child, welcomes me” (Matthew 18:5). He 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 those who cannot protect themselves. We affirm this responsibility at each person’s baptism by our congregational response, pledging: “With God’s help we will so order our lives after the example of Christ, that this person, surrounded by steadfast love, may be established in the faith, and confirmed and strengthened in the way that leads to life eternal” (Book of Worship, Baptismal Covenant, Congregational Pledge, 11).

III. Definitions

For the purpose of this policy, we will use the following terms:

- Child or youth: Any person under the age of 18
- Adult: Any person 18 years old or older
- Vulnerable adult: Any person 18 years or older who is in need of special care, support or protection due to diminished physical, mental or emotional capacities or at risk of abuse due to the power dynamics of the situation (e.g. mission work or visitation ministries)
- Leader: Any adult—paid or volunteer—who has supervision or management responsibilities for the event, program or ministry

IV. Scope

This policy shall apply to all activities sponsored by Concord United Methodist Church, regardless of location, as well as any activities utilizing its facilities. Outside groups utilizing the church's facilities shall be required to adhere to this policy or adopt and adhere to equivalent policies. Where the two policies are in conflict, the more conservative approach shall be taken.

V. Policy

a. Liability Insurance

The church shall have adequate liability insurance for all ministries, including sexual abuse or misconduct coverage.

b. Screening and Selection

All persons serving in leadership with children, youth or vulnerable adults shall be:

- An active member of the local ministry for at least six months
- At least 18 years of age
- At least five years older than the oldest person they are supervising/leading (Exception: This does not apply to adults in ministry with vulnerable adults.)

As part of the selection process, applicants must:

- Submit an application and personal references
- Participate in an interview process as determined by the Pastor and the Administrative Council, or the PPRC in the case of employees.
- Consent to a National Criminal Background Check

Any conviction involving abuse of or harm toward children, youth or vulnerable adults will disqualify the applicant from participating in ministries with children, youth or vulnerable adults. All other convictions will be reviewed by the Pastor, the Chairman of the Administrative Council, and the Chairman of the PPRC in order to ensure the safety of all involved.

All documentation collected as part of the application and screening process shall be maintained in a permanent secure file accessible only to the Pastor, the Chairman of the Administrative Council, and the Chairman of the PPRC.

c. Youth helpers

Youth helpers are considered children or youth under the age of 18 who assist with ministries (e.g. Vacation Bible School).

Youth helpers shall follow all of the same guidelines as adult leaders.

Youth helpers shall never be alone with children without an adult present.

d. Training

All leaders shall be trained annually in the practices of Safe Sanctuaries and a record of attendees shall be kept on file for a minimum of seven years.

Local church staff or lay leadership may facilitate Safe Sanctuaries at the local church level. However, it is expected that at least once every four years that the church utilize conference leadership to be updated on new and emerging trends in Safe Sanctuaries.

The church community shall be informed of the Safe Sanctuaries policy and how the church is working to prevent abuse. The church community shall also be notified in advance of Safe Sanctuaries training opportunities.

Training may be offered to the following:

- Any leader of church-sponsored ministry with children, youth or vulnerable adults
- Any leader of outside groups that utilize the church facilities for activities with children, youth or vulnerable adults
- Any person in the community who would like to learn more about Safe Sanctuaries and its ministry of abuse prevention

The training shall include information, explanation and discussion of the following:

- Local church policy and operational procedures
- Appropriate boundary guidelines
- Appropriate playground/recreational supervision
- Behaviors or other indicators which may signal concerns or abuse
- Requirements of North Carolina law for reporting incidents of abuse
- Procedures for reporting observed or suspected incidents or abuse

e. Activity Procedures

All activities involving children, youth or vulnerable adults shall adhere to the following minimum requirements:

- There shall be two unrelated adults present at all times.
 - “Unrelated adults” is interpreted as adults who are not related to one another. (The adults may be related to participants, but not to one another.)
 - When two unrelated adults are not able to be present, two related adults shall be present, so long as they are not in a marital relationship. (Married adults may lead together, but there must be at least one more adult present.)
 - If it is not possible to have two adults present at all times, the activity must take place in an open space—indoors or outdoors—where other adults are able to witness the activity and interactions of all involved.
 - It is NOT acceptable to have only one adult present with children, youth or vulnerable adults in a private space, or any space where other adults are not able to witness the activities and interactions of all involved.
 - If participants represent more than one gender, then there shall be at least one male adult leader and one female adult leader.

- There shall be at least one adult present at all activities who is trained in first aid and CPR. First aid kits shall be readily available in the Family Life Center, and the Sanctuary.
- There shall be a roving monitor during high-volume ministry and class times (e.g. Sunday School).
- At no time shall windows be obscured or doors locked to areas where children, youth or vulnerable adults are meeting. (Exception: Active shooter drills or incidents.)
- All leaders assisting with diaper changing, toileting and clothes changes of young children or of children, youth or adults with special needs shall follow guidelines as set forth in training. The two adult policy as outlined above in V.d. shall be followed.
- All leaders supervising or assisting with recreational or playground activities shall follow guidelines, including the two adult policy as outlined above in V.d., as set forth in training.
- All leaders shall follow appropriate boundary guidelines as set forth in training. For example:
 - Appropriate boundary setting for all leaders engaging in ministry with vulnerable adults
 - Appropriate boundary setting for youth leaders, especially focused on small group ministry, overnight retreats and transportation to and from activities
 - Appropriate boundary setting for clergy and leaders regarding counseling and confidentiality

f. Individual counseling

Sometimes one-on-one interactions are necessary, specifically in reference to counseling. These interactions must be conducted in an appropriate manner.

The clergyperson, staff person, or lay leader shall conduct the meeting in a visible space, meaning that the office door is cracked open or a window is visible and someone can reasonably see all persons in the room, or the meeting shall take place in a public place.

Suspected abuse or neglect uncovered in counseling shall be reported in accordance with North Carolina law.

g. Internet and Social Media

Images and names of children, youth and vulnerable adults shall not be utilized on any website or application without explicit consent.

A social media covenant shall be adopted and adhered to by all participants and leaders. This covenant shall be kept on file as an addendum to this policy. At a minimum, this covenant shall include:

- Leaders shall never initiate a social media connection (friend, follower, link, etc.)
- Boundaries regarding calling, texting and private messaging
- Boundaries regarding taking and distributing photos and videos
- Boundaries regarding social media posts

h. Transportation

Concord United Methodist Church does not transport Children/Youth to any functions, whatsoever. This is the sole responsibility of Parents or Guardians.

When using charter buses or other contracted drivers, the carrier must provide certification that the driver has completed a recent background check.

All vehicle use requirements set forth by the Board of Trustees shall be followed.

i. Off-Site and Overnight Events

All requirements from section V. e. Activity Procedures shall be adhered to.

Adults and children or youth who are unrelated shall not share beds.

Leaders must obtain medical information and liability release forms for all participants and keep those records on hand throughout the off-site activity or overnight event.

Leaders shall provide parents or guardians with specific information regarding the schedule, sleeping arrangements, leader-to-participant ratios and emergency contact information.

j. Missionaries

When engaging in mission work—whether domestically or globally—missionaries are intrinsically put in a place of power over the persons they serve. Due to these power dynamics, all persons participating in mission work shall follow the screening, selection, training, activity, counseling, transportation, and off-site/overnight event regulations as set forth above.

VI. Reporting and Response

a. Documentation and Reporting

- All incidents—including accidents and suspected abuse—shall be documented in writing on the Incident Report Form and kept on file. The form is available from the Pastor, or the church office.
- In the event of an accident or injury, one copy of the Incident Report Form shall be given to the parent or guardian of the affected child, youth or vulnerable adult.
- In the event that an allegation of abuse or misconduct is made against a volunteer or lay leader, a report shall be made to the ministry area leader who shall report it to the Pastor.
- In the event that an allegation of abuse is made against a clergy member or staff person, a report shall be made to the chairperson of the Staff/Pastor-Parish Relations Committee.

b. Mandatory State Reporting

All reporting of alleged or actual incidents of child or vulnerable adult abuse must strictly follow North Carolina law. Although there is no obligation for private citizens to report evidence of most crimes, North Carolina citizens have a legal duty to report in the following situations:

- Suspected child abuse or neglect by a parent, guardian or caretaker NC G.S. 7B-301(a)
- Suspected abuse, neglect or exploitation of a vulnerable adult by their caretaker NC G.S. 108A-2

A leader who has reasonable cause to suspect that abuse has occurred should secure the safety of the child, youth or vulnerable adult (if possible) and then immediately report the incident to appropriate law enforcement.

It is never the responsibility of a leader to investigate allegations of abuse.

c. Response

All allegations shall be taken seriously.

A quick, compassionate, and unified response to an alleged incident of child or adult abuse will be initiated following the direction of the appointed clergy in the local church and in consultation with the District Superintendent of the Yadkin Valley District.

In the case that the alleged incident involves the appointed clergy, the response will be directed by the District Superintendent of the Yadkin Valley District.

A response will include appropriate pastoral care and support for all involved in the allegation, including the alleged perpetrator(s), alleged victim(s) and their families.

d. Interaction with the Media

In the event that an incident receives media attention, the only persons authorized to speak to the media are the Pastor and District Superintendent.

If approached by the media, all others should not comment and instead endeavor to help the media find the authorized spokesperson(s).

VII. Policy Review

A team comprised of representatives of age-level ministries, the Staff/Pastor-Parish Relations Committee, Board of Trustees, and Finance Committee, as well as others whom they invite to participate in the team's work, shall be responsible for reviewing this policy on an annual basis for relevance and adherence to requirements established by the Western North Carolina Conference.

Adopted March 16, 2021 by Administrative Board

Addendum to the Safe Sanctuary Policy of Concord United Methodist Church

Internet and Social Media Covenant

The congregation of Concord United Methodist Church is committed to providing a safe and secure environment for all children, youth, and vulnerable adults. In furtherance of our Safe Sanctuary policy, all participants and leaders in any church sponsored mission, program, or activity involving children, youth, or vulnerable adults will adhere to the following:

1. Adults shall NEVER initiate a social media connection with a child, youth, or vulnerable adult. This includes friend, follower, link, etc.
2. The two adult policy as set forth in section V. e. of the Safe Sanctuary Policy will be required for any calling, and texting between an adult and a child, youth, or vulnerable adult. Private messaging will not be allowed.
3. Taking of photos and videos of children, youth, and vulnerable adults will not be allowed without the express written consent of the parents, guardians, or responsible adult. It is our strictest policy to NEVER post photos and videos of children, youth, and vulnerable adults on the internet, or any social media platform.

Dated: _____

Signed: _____

Printed: _____

Pastor: _____

Chairman Administrative Council: _____