

Guidelines for a safe sanctuaries response plan

These are merely guidelines and suggestions for a local church safe sanctuaries response plan. Each local church must set its own response plan in conjunction with applied safe sanctuaries procedures. A key assumption is that this information will be part of the education and communication with all volunteers, staff, leaders and members of the congregation in regular training and orientation sessions in accordance with the local church safe sanctuaries policy and procedures.

Reporting Requirements

In North Carolina, everyone is required to report incidents of abuse. Local church safe sanctuaries procedures and practices should go by North Carolina law and beyond because of who we are as a church. Resources to understand NC law and resources for understanding how to report abuse are available from Prevent Child Abuse of NC at www.preventchildabusenc.org and 1-800-CHIDREN.

Specify •immediately report and document; and •keep report strictly confidential

Reporting Procedure

Have a “confidante” identified and named as someone anyone can go to with concerns.

Within the local church identify at least **two** persons to whom reports of incidents may be made. Have a confidential incident report form to document all relevant facts.

The reporter may contact local law enforcement/Dept of Soc Services directly and the report may be given anonymously.

Responding to a Report

- 1) Take steps to ensure the safety of the alleged victim.
- 2) Documentation – confidential incident report form (For a complete list of what full documentation should include see below).
- 3) Notification of the parent(s)/guardian(s) of the alleged victim.
- 4) Take steps to ensure the alleged victim has no contact with the alleged wrongdoer during the investigation.
- 5) Remove the alleged wrongdoer from the leadership position pending investigation.
- 6) Notify the church’s attorney, insurance carrier and the District Superintendent.

Investigation of a Report

To be conducted by a “supervising committee” (as determined and named in the local church safe sanctuaries policy and procedures) and including church’s attorney.

To be kept strictly confidential.

Thorough documentation (see below) and confidential file maintained.

All relevant witnesses contacted and interviewed – in interviews use open-ended questions.

Interests of the alleged victim and alleged wrongdoer are to be protected.

Conclusion reached as promptly as possible after a sound investigation (suggested within 72 hours).

Conclusion of NO abuse

Written report offered to designated church leadership (ex: Trustees):

- preserve anonymity of victim and witnesses
- summary of allegations and investigation
- conclusion and supporting reasons
- temporary actions taken
- recommendation of additional action to be taken

Follow-up notification with insurance carrier and District Superintendent

Conclusion of Abuse

A) Written report to designated church leadership:

- identify victim, wrongdoer and witnesses
- allegations and steps of investigation
- facts revealed by each significant witness
- conclusion and supporting reasons
- temporary actions taken
- recommendation of additional action to be taken

B) Incident reported to local law enforcement/Department of Social Services (all appropriate government authorities) – preparation to cooperate fully with their investigation

C) Incident reported in claim to insurance carrier

D) Incident reported to District Superintendent

E) Implement crisis response plan

Crisis Response Plan

Select a spokesperson to handle dissemination of information to staff, media, and congregation.

Have ready for release a clear position statement of the church's policy and procedures to safeguard children, youth and vulnerable adults.

Use text or prepared public statements to answer the press and inform the congregation. At all times strictly maintain the privacy and confidentiality of all persons involved.

(Spokesperson) Keep in mind that information given or obtained by the media may have a bearing on church liability.

Resource: *Not If, But When* from UM Communications

Ministry of Supportive Care

Supportive care should be given to all persons involved including the victim (and their family) and the accused (and their family) to restore such persons to wholeness. Supportive care may include procedures of the criminal justice system, provision of the current Book of Discipline, appropriate counseling referrals and pastoral visitation.

After Abuse

Truth-telling and honest communication is key.

Possibilities:

- 1) Send a letter to members of the congregation explaining the incident and initial action taken (without identification of the victim or accused). Restate the safe sanctuaries procedures and practices employed by the church to ensure safe continuation of the church's ministry.
- 2) Hold a congregational meeting – only after careful and intentional planning – see *Safe Sanctuaries for Youth* by Joy Melton, pg 70-72.

Plan for continuing ministry:

What education programs need to be offered?

What support opportunities are needed?

What pastoral care is called for?

(See below for “If the Abuser is One of Us...”)

Additional resource to North Carolina Conference United Methodist Churches:

Sexual Ethics Concerns Toll-free Phone Number: 1-877-603-8816

Documentation to include

-name of the employee or volunteer observing or receiving the disclosure of abuse, including date, time and place, and any action taken by this person

-alleged victim's name, age and date of birth

-any statement made by the alleged victim

-name of the accused person, the date, time and place of any conversation with the accused and any statement made by the accused

-any action taken (ex: suspension of the accused)

-date and time of call to alleged victim's parent(s)/guardian(s) and content of the conversation

-date and time of call to local law enforcement/Dept of Social Services, name of person spoken to, content of conversation and any case number assigned

-date and time of any other contacts made regarding the incident

If the Abuser is One of Us...

Two factors to keep in mind:

- 1) focus on behaviors and not character (the abuser is a person of sacred worth but their behavior is harmful/sinful and not acceptable)
- 2) survivors are present in every congregation and without precautions and safety measures in place will not find the church to be a place for healing

Elements of congregational response

Education and awareness

Safe Sanctuaries policy and procedures adopted and applied

Specific procedures where the perpetrator is present

Develop a written covenant signed by perpetrator and church officials to include:

- as part of growth and penitence, perpetrator prepares and delivers written acknowledgment and apologies for pain caused directly or indirectly by their actions
- expectation of compliance to all restrictions and requirements placed on them as result of any legal actions
- continual participation in professional counseling program while participating in church community
- no leadership or representational position within or on behalf of the church
- covenant partners identified by church leadership for perpetrator
- participation in congregational worship and adult Sunday School class only, use of direct route from parking to main entrance only; any other participation or access requires prior authorization and accompaniment by covenant partners
- not allowed use of restroom facilities in church buildings, in the case of an emergency must be accompanied by covenant partner
- any church-sponsored functions for families, must be accompanied by covenant partners
- no time allowed at any location in or around the church which would cause undue distress to others

Avenues for care and healing for the congregation

Outside professional intervention arranged

Anticipation of additional disclosures of past or current abuse