

North Carolina Conference United Methodist Church
Safe Sanctuaries[®] Policy for Children, Youth, and Vulnerable Adults

Introduction: Our Wesleyan heritage calls us as United Methodists to justice and advocacy for those in our communities whose voices are often overlooked or not heard. The realities of the world around us cause us to focus in particular on the children, youth, and vulnerable adults who participate in ministries of the North Carolina Conference. Among those realities is that fact that during the 2012 fiscal year for the State of North Carolina, there were 129,453 children reported to local Departments of Social Services as possible victims of abuse and/or neglect. The North Carolina Division of Aging and Adult Services (NC DAAS) received 19,635 reports of adult abuse, neglect, or exploitation during the same period (data from online 2012 reports at www.ncdhhs.gov).

North Carolina Conference boards, agencies, and commissions are responsible for ensuring a safe environment at any and all Conference events on behalf children, youth, and vulnerable adults. The example and teaching of Jesus tells us that every individual has talents, gifts, and undiscovered possibilities that together make the Body of Christ stronger. God values human life, intending all men, women, and children to have worth and dignity in all relationships with God and others. To this end, the Conference cares deeply about the safety and well-being of all God's children who come to us to experience God's love, especially children, youth and those people who fall within the definition of vulnerable adults whose disabilities, health conditions, and/or age result in the need for personal assistance, supervision, and/or other specialized programming.

The Conference realizes that no person, organization, board, agency, or commission can absolutely guarantee the safety and security of all people at all times. However, the Conference believes that the risk of harm to the children, youth, and vulnerable adults who come to programs and events sponsored by the North Carolina Conference of The United Methodist Church can be reduced through the establishment of and adherence to reasonable policies and procedures.

To that end, the Conference implements this "Policy for the Protection of Children, Youth, and Vulnerable Adults" (hereinafter the "Policy") for boards, agencies, and commissions in order to:

- establish reasonable procedures to reduce the risk of physical, emotional, and sexual abuse of our children, youth, and vulnerable adults as they participate in North Carolina Conference events;
- protect our children, youth, and vulnerable adults;
- protect our staff and volunteers from false allegations of misconduct.

This policy applies to all staff and volunteers, clergy or lay, who have contact with or responsibility for children, youth, and/or vulnerable adults at Conference-sponsored events. This

policy is not intended to supplant or replace any other policy for sexual ethics for clergy, diaconal ministers, and certified lay professionals. Neither does it supplant or replace any policy the North Carolina Conference has in place for the reporting of suspected abuse or neglect.

Therefore, in covenant with The United Methodist Church, we adopt this policy and its accompanying procedures for the prevention of abuse of children, youth, and vulnerable adults in the North Carolina Conference of The United Methodist Church.

Theological Foundation:

Go out into the roads and lanes, and compel people to come in, so that
my house may be filled. Luke 14:21 (NRSV)

A new commandment I give you: love one another. As I have loved you,
so you must love one another. John 13:34 (NIV)

In the Parable of the Great Banquet, Jesus reminds us that God invites all people to the table, where they can be nurtured and transformed to be Christ to others. Today, we continue to recognize that each individual is a child of God and must be allowed to live free of fear, surrounded by love. As Christian adults, we must establish and maintain a nurturing, loving, safe and secure Christian environment, providing support and assistance to our children, youth, and vulnerable adults, remembering that our mandate is not only a responsibility, but also an opportunity to protect the gift that God has bestowed upon each of us.

General Conference Action: In 1996, the General Conference of The United Methodist Church adopted a resolution designed to reduce the risk of child sexual abuse in the church. This resolution contains 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” (§ 162C).

Tragically, churches have not always been safe places for children. Child sexual abuse, exploitation and ritual abuse occur in churches both large and small, urban and rural. The problem cuts across all economic, cultural, and racial lines. It is real and 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— 2000*, pp.180-181.)

Statement of Commitment: The North Carolina Conference of The United Methodist Church is committed to conducting our ministry so that children, youth and adults will be safe to grow spiritually. We further commit to demonstrating the love of Jesus Christ so that each person 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). We strive to fulfill this commitment to prevent abuse and neglect of our children and youth in programs of both the Conference and its local churches through preventive measures, reporting, education and training.

Purpose: The purpose of establishing this policy and the related procedures is to demonstrate our unwavering commitment to providing a place where children, youth, vulnerable adults, volunteers and staff can be safe to grow in God, and become the people God intends them to be.

Application: This policy applies to the adults who work with children and youth (age 18 and younger) and/or vulnerable adults in ministries beyond the local church, including but not limited to the conference camping ministry, conference youth events, and missions trips.

Under this policy, all adult workers must be Safe Sanctuaries® educated in order to participate in programs beyond the local church. All workers must be at least 18 years of age, have received Conference-recognized Safe Sanctuaries® training, completed the paperwork, and should be at least 5 years older than the youth with whom they work. They must have been members/participants in a local church or campus ministry for a minimum of six months.

This policy for the protection of children, youth, and vulnerable adults of the North Carolina Conference United Methodist Church shall be reviewed for updates and/or changes every quadrennium and approved by the Conference Committee on Safe Sanctuaries. Any changes will be brought before the Annual Conference for adoption.

ADDENDUM INFORMATION:

TYPES OF ABUSE

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 welfare. The following definitions are taken from: “Safe Sanctuaries: Reducing the Risk of Abuse in the Church for Children and Youth” by Joy Thornburg Melton, pages 29-30 (children) and pages 61-62 (youth).

Physical Abuse: Abuse in which a person deliberately and intentionally causes bodily harm to a child or youth. 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 to a child's body.

Emotional Abuse: Abuse in which a person exposes a child or youth to spoken and/or unspoken violence or emotional cruelty.

Neglect: Abuse in which a person endangers a child's or youth's health, safety, or welfare through negligence.

Sexual Abuse: Abuse in which sexual contact between a child or youth and an adult (or another older and more powerful youth) occurs.

Ritual Abuse: Abuse in which physical, sexual, or psychological violations of a child or youth are inflicted regularly, intentionally, and in a stylized way by a person or persons responsible for the child's welfare.

NORTH CAROLINA STATUTES

Because of our commitment to care for all God's children and protect the vulnerable, North Carolina Conference sponsored activities fully comply with the definitions offered by the North Carolina Department of Social Services governing children, youth, and vulnerable adults.

Child and adult protection programs are mandated by statute. The State of North Carolina's current child abuse reporting statute was first enacted in 1975. Section 7B-301 states that "any person or institution who has cause to suspect that any juvenile is abused, neglected, or dependent, as defined by G. S. 7B-101, or has died as the result of maltreatment, shall report the case of that juvenile to the director of the department of social services in the county where the juvenile resides or is found. The report may be made orally, by telephone, or in writing. The report shall include information as is known to the person making it including the name and address of the juvenile; the name and address of the juvenile's parent, guardian, or caretaker; the age of the juvenile; the names and ages of other juveniles in the home; the present whereabouts of the juvenile if not at the home address; the nature and extent of any injury or condition resulting from abuse, neglect, or dependency; and any other information which the person making the report believes might be helpful in establishing the need for protective services or court intervention." The statute is comprehensive, requiring the reporting of numerous types of maltreatment. The law applies to any child under 18 years of age when a parent or any person responsible for the child's care:

- Causes or threatens to cause non-accidental physical or mental injury;
- Has a child present during the manufacture or attempted manufacture of a controlled substance or during the sale of such substance where such activity would constitute a felony violation;
- Neglects or refuses to provide adequate food, clothing, shelter, emotional nurturing, or health care;
- Abandons the child;

- Neglects or refuses to provide adequate supervision in relation to the child's age and level of development;
- Knowingly leaves a child alone in the same dwelling with a person, not related by blood or marriage, who has been convicted of an offense against a minor for which registration is required as a violent sexual offender; or
- Commits or allows to be committed any illegal sexual act upon a child, including incest, rape, indecent exposure, prostitution, or allows a child to be used in any sexually explicit visual material.

An act of child abuse may be committed by any person responsible for the care of another individual who is less than eighteen years of age. It does not matter whether the person caring for the child under the age of 18 is a compensated or a volunteer worker. It does not matter whether the person routinely is entrusted with the care of children or whether such individual only occasionally comes in contact with children. It does not matter whether the person was entrusted with the care of a child for an hour or only a moment. It only matters that a child was abused or neglected by the person who, on the occasion in question, was responsible for the child's care.

Disabled adults of any age are protected in North Carolina under State law (N. C. General Statute 108A-102), which mandates that "any person having reasonable cause to believe that a disabled adult is in need shall report such information." Disabled/vulnerable adults are defined as people over the age of 18 who are mentally or physically challenged, either temporarily or long-term who are unable to fully care for themselves.

The following definitions were taken from North Carolina General Statute, Chapter 108A, Article 6, the NC Adult Protective Services Statute:

- Abuse: means the willful infliction of physical pain, injury or mental anguish, unreasonable confinement, or the willful deprivation by a caretaker of services, which are necessary to maintain mental and physical health.
- Exploitation: means the illegal or improper use of a disabled adult or his resources for another's profit or advantage.
- Neglect: refers to a disabled adult who is either living alone and not able to provide for himself the services which are necessary to maintain his mental or physical health or is not receiving services from his caretaker.

Within these three areas fall categories of abuse such as:

- Abandonment—the desertion of an older adult by an individual who has assumed responsibility for providing care or by a person with physical custody of the older adult.
- Emotional or psychological abuse—the infliction of anguish, pain, or distress through verbal or nonverbal acts.
- Financial or material exploitation—the illegal or improper use of an older adult's funds, property, or assets.
- Misuse of restraints—chemical or physical control of an older adult long-term care facility resident beyond what their physician has ordered.

- Neglect—the refusal or failure to fulfill any part of a person’s obligations or duties to an older adult.
- Physical abuse—the use of physical force that may result in bodily injury, physical pain, or impairment.
- Self-neglect—characterized as the behavior of an older adult that threatens his/her own health or safety without the understanding of the consequences of his/her decisions.
- Sexual abuse—non-consensual sexual contact of any kind with an older adult and/or sexual contact with any person incapable of giving consent.