

SAFE SANCTUARY POLICY - ROSSVILLE UMC
(January 2022)

I. 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 one such child in my name welcomes me" (Matthew 18:5).

Children are our present and our future, our hope, our teachers, our invitation—they are full participants in the life of the church and in the realm of God. Jesus also said, "If anyone causes one of these little ones—those who believe in me—to stumble, it would be better for them to have a large millstone hung around their neck and to be drowned in the depths 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.

Many 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 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 1996. Copyright © 1996 by The United Methodist Publishing House.)

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

A. Purpose

Our congregation's purpose for establishing this Safe Sanctuaries Policy and accompanying procedures is to demonstrate our absolute and unwavering commitment to the physical safety and spiritual growth of all of our children and youth.

B. Statement of Covenant

Therefore, as a Christian community of faith and a United Methodist congregation, Rossville United Methodist Church (hereafter referred to as RUMC) pledges 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 safety 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 (including first aid and methods of discipline); and we will have a clearly defined procedure for reporting a suspected incident of abuse that conforms to the requirements of state law.

C. Conclusion

In all of our ministries with children and youth, this congregation is committed to demonstrating the love of Jesus Christ so that each child 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).

II. DEFINITIONS

Abuse – Any act committed by a person in a position of trust (parent, caregiver, Sunday school teacher, pastor, or other) which harms or threatens to harm a person's welfare, physical, spiritual or mental health. We recognize abuse may fall into four categories:

Physical Abuse - Inflicting bodily harm to minors constitutes physical abuse. Instances of physical abuse include any physical act of undue force such as assault with a knife, strap or other implement; burns, fractures and bruises resulting from being beaten, pushed down, shaken, pinched, slapped or thrown. Physical abuse does not always leave visible marks.

Sexual Abuse - Any time a minor is used for the sexual stimulation of an adult or older minor, abuse has occurred. The minor is powerless either to consent to or resist such sexual acts. This includes fondling, sexual intercourse, participation in sexual acts, incest, exploitation for the purpose of pornography or prostitution and/or exposure to adult sexual activity.

Emotional Abuse - Emotional abuse deeply affects a minor's self-esteem by submitting him/her to verbal assault or emotional cruelty. It does not always involve injuries we can see. The minor receives the message that he/she is not good and never will be. Emotional abuse can include closed confinement (being shut in a small area), making racial remarks, excessive punishment, use of profanity, knowingly permitting drug or alcohol abuse, ignoring or encouraging peer abuse.

Neglect - Not hearing or addressing a minor's basic needs for health, welfare or safety resulting in harm to the minor. It can include any of the following acts of negligence or maltreatment: failure to provide adequate food, shelter, clothing; abandonment; refusal to seek treatment for illness; inadequate supervision; health hazards in the home, school, or church; and/or ignoring a minor's need for contact, affirmation, stimulation and nurture.

Adult - Any person 18 years of age or older.

Appropriate Conduct - Conduct that one would reasonably assume would be acceptable and permissible by the child's parent or guardian.

Assistant - Person who lends aid to the Leader and acts at the direction of the Leader.

Authority - Any person placed in a position of authority in the ministries of RUMC.

Child/Children - Any person birth through 6th grade.

Church - The local congregation of RUMC.

Leader - The primary leader, staff or volunteer, of youth and children's activities; anyone directly responsible for supervising and overseeing a specific RUMC function, event, or activity.

Parent/Guardian - Any parent, step parent, foster parent, grandparent or appointed guardian who has the general responsibility for the health, education or welfare of a child or an adult with special needs.

Staff - Any person receiving a salary, wages, or other compensation for providing any services, care, guidance, assistance, or supervision for the church.

Volunteers - Any person not receiving a salary, wages or other compensation for providing any services, care, guidance, assistance or supervision for any child or any adult with special needs within a church-related function, event or activity; all volunteers must have been an active part of the church for 6 months before being allowed to serve in areas with children or youth ministries.

Youth - Any person who has completed the 6th grade – 12th grade (includes those youth who have just graduated until September of their graduation year).

III. Standards

Minimum Age

The following standards for Leaders and Assistants are designed to separate authority figures from the group they are serving by age or enough years to reinforce recognition of the authority figure's role. RUMC adopts the following standards for Leaders and Assistants.

1. **LEADERS**-- The primary leader, staff or volunteer, of youth and children's activities; anyone directly responsible for supervising and overseeing a specific RUMC function, event, or activity.

(a) To work with youth (any person who has completed the 6th grade – 12th grade), the Leader must be a high school graduate for a minimum of 2 years or 21 years of age

(b) To work with children (infant-6th grade), the Leader must be a minimum of 18 years of age.

2. **ASSISTANTS**-- Persons who lend aid to the Leader and act at the direction of the Leader. Whether working with children or youth, Assistants must be:

(a) A minimum of 2 years older than the age that they are serving; and

(b) In the judgment of an RUMC staff member, competent to assist in the activity.

Two Adult Rule

At least two Safe Sanctuary-trained adults are to be present during all church-sponsored programming with children. For youth, two adults are preferred or a minimum of 3 youth and one 1 adult present at all times. All adult/child ratios must be followed (see III, D). Where it is impossible to staff two adults in every room, an additional adult must serve as a floater with visual and physical access to all areas. The exception to this rule will be those giving private lessons in the facility and, in that case, the Leader will be required to have a background check. If the two are related by blood or marriage, it is strongly recommended that an unrelated third adult be present. No person under the age of 18 may serve as an adult under this rule.

While mentoring and counseling are encouraged and supported, adults and authority figures should take every precaution to avoid being alone with a child or youth in inaccessible areas.

This can include, but is not limited to:

- An automobile while taking a child home;
- A classroom with windowless/locked doors; and/or
- A cabin at camp

Six Month Rule

All volunteers must have been an active part of the church for 6 months before being allowed to serve in areas with children or youth ministries. Persons not meeting this minimum requirement may serve only as an Assistant with another trained adult.

Participants With Special Needs

In the judgment of RUMC staff, Children's Council Representative, and in consultation with the parent, the "TWO ADULT RULE" may be adjusted depending on the nature and degree of a participants' special needs.

Transportation

All transportation of children/youth shall be in compliance with RUMC's transportation/vehicle policy. Additionally, only adults who are a high school graduate for a minimum of 2 years or 21 years of age shall transport children/youth during any RUMC activity. During transportation,

there must be at least 2 adults meeting the requirements mentioned above or, if circumstances absolutely prevent having a second adult, at least 2, more preferably 3 children/youth in each vehicle.

Policy Instruction

All volunteers and paid staff are required to attend policy instruction before working with children and youth. In the case that this is not possible, the staff person/volunteer may only serve as an Assistant with another trained adult and under the stipulation that they attend the next training session. All volunteers and staff are required annually to review this policy, to attend a policy instruction session, and to sign a new participation statement kept on file at the church.

Written Record of Departure from Policy

RUMC realizes that unforeseen departures in this policy may occur. In cases of departure, whether intentional or accidental, the Leader or Assistant must attempt to obtain permission from a parent and also a written record of departure must be given to and kept on file by the Children's Coordinator. Authority figures are expected to report these departures as quickly as possible.

Outside Groups Working With Children or Youth

All groups involving youth or children that meet at RUMC or use RUMC facilities must abide by the RUMC Safe Sanctuaries Policy. Also, all groups must review and sign a form that states that they have reviewed and agreed to abide by the RUMC Safe Sanctuaries Policy.

IV. Screening Procedures

All staff will be screened by the designated person or persons in regards to the area of service.

The Children's Coordinator will be responsible for screening volunteers and sharing that information with the Children's Council. The Children's Coordinator will keep a record of all those who have been screened including the date of their screening and will house all applicable forms on file in the church office.

An essential component of preventing abuse by Leaders, Assistants, and staff is careful screening. Although we recognize the integrity of an overwhelming number of the persons with discerned calling to ministries with children, youth and vulnerable persons, we realize that abuse may occur in the church. Therefore, we believe that all Leaders, Assistants, and all staff must be properly screened. It will be the responsibility of the Children's Council and the Minister to ensure compliance.

The following steps are used for screening volunteer and staff applicants:

Application Form

A completed application form will be required for all Leaders and Staff and will be kept on file by the Children's Coordinator in the Church Office.

Interview with Applicants

An interview will be conducted with all applicants. The interviewer should not ask for information about marital status or handicapping conditions as stated in Federal/State discrimination guidelines. The interviewer should also be sensitive to age and sex discrimination guidelines; however adequate information may be requested to ensure compliance with this policy's minimum standards.

The interviewer should be aware of red flags. These are indicators of issues that must be explored further in order for one to be assured that all information is collected concerning a prospective staff member/volunteer. The interviewer needs to be able to explore issues as they arise during the interview and to depart from the set of prepared questions to do so.

Red flags might include but are not limited to:

- Many addresses over a short period of time
- This could indicate that a person is trying to be anonymous, but it could also indicate that they were a college student who moved a lot to keep rent low.
- Wants to work with only one age group

If someone would like to work with only one specific age group, it could indicate that the person has targeted that age group for molestation, or it could mean that is the age group for which they are trained and that experience has shown that they are not as gifted with other ages. Also be aware of anyone who seems overly committed to one age group. For example, someone who simultaneously leads a scout troop, coaches Little League, serves as a Big Brother and now wants to teach Sunday School may be neglecting their own age appropriate peer relationships in order to cultivate potential victims.

- Does not want/need/like close supervision
- The interview may indicate that the person does not like to be closely supervised which might raise questions about motivation for applying for this work.

Reference Checks

A minimum of two references must be contacted on all applicants. It is further recommended that the reference of a church official (Minister, Staff-Parish Relations Chairperson [SPRC], Youth Director, etc.) from the church of the applicant's membership be obtained.

Background and Motor Vehicle Checks

Background checks will be given to Staff, Leaders, and all of those serving in an overnight capacity with children or youth. Background checks include, but are not limited to:

- Criminal histories
- Motor vehicle record
- Registered sexual offenders

The background checks will be initiated and seen only by the Children's Coordinator and Children's Council Representative. Only concerns will be reported to the Minister who, in turn, will decide how the situation will be handled.

The Children's Coordinator will work with the Safe Sanctuaries Committee to insure that all screenings will be updated every 5 years and will inform ministry heads of needed screenings. In the case of a person being absent from the ministry of RUMC for more than 1 year, a new background check will be required. Motor vehicle checks will be given to any person driving a church vehicle or driving for an out-of-town trip. All efforts should be made to obtain parental consent before any child or youth are allowed to ride in a vehicle for an RUMC- sponsored event.

Federal and State Law: Church Employment Policies

The requirements of any and all Federal laws or State laws affecting or relating to employment or child abuse must be complied with, and in any case where there is a conflict between such laws and the procedure outlined in this document, said laws shall prevail and the procedure outlined in the document shall be modified to the extent necessary to eliminate such conflict. This policy is subject to all Federal and/or State laws relating to employment and child abuse. Likewise, while this policy addresses both staff and volunteers interacting with children and youth, in instances where this policy conflicts with Church employment policies for staff, such employment policies shall take precedence.

V. Reporting Abuse

All reports of suspected child abuse must be taken seriously. Whenever child abuse is suspected, reports must immediately be made to the Department of Child Services (1-877-237-0004) (<http://www.tn.gov/youth/contact.htm>) and the Minister. In the event the alleged victim feels uncomfortable reporting to the Minister or if the suspected abuse involves the Minister, reports may also be made to the Staff Parish Relations Chairperson (SPRC).

The SPRC may be reached by contacting Administrative Board Chair and requesting their information. If the abuse reported has taken place within the church or the perpetrator is a church member or staff, the Minister and/or SPRC shall also report the suspected abuse to the District Superintendent.

VI. Investigation

Whenever child abuse is suspected, the following information should be obtained and reported to The Department of Child Services (877-237-0004) (<http://www.tn.gov/youth/contact.htm>) and then reported to the Minister and/or Staff Parish Relations Committee Chairperson:

- (1) Names, ages, addresses and telephone numbers of both the accused and the abused
- (2) The nature of the alleged abuse, with dates where possible
- (3) The factual details of the report
- (4) The name of the person making the report and the date that the information was received.

Interim measures may be taken during the investigation to safeguard the potential victim or victims. At the conclusion of the investigation, appropriate actions shall be taken. Depending upon the findings, this may include termination of employment.

VII. Safe Sanctuaries Committee

RUMC shall maintain an active Safe Sanctuaries Committee, consisting of the Minister, the Children's Coordinator, Children's Council and appropriate congregational members chosen for their wisdom, experience, training, or involvement in affected ministries. The membership of the board shall be posted in plain view at all times to assist all persons faced with the task of reporting suspected or actually observed abuse. The Safe Sanctuaries Board shall promptly investigate and report all incidents reported to it and shall meet at least quarterly and at such times as is necessary, to review policies, recommend needed changes, and consider and decide policy inquiries received from Staff members, Volunteers, parents, guardians, or other members of the congregation.