

**First United Methodist Church of Blairstown**  
10 Stillwater Road  
Blairstown, NJ 07825

**Safe Sanctuaries Policy:**  
**Reducing the Risk of Abuse in our Church**

Adopted May 15, 2012  
Updated August 2, 2016

**Summary of Issues:**

Because the tragedy of abuse of children, youth, and vulnerable adults is a reality in our world, and because we recognize our responsibility to ensure a safe and protected environment for our children, The Greater New Jersey Annual Conference (GNJAC) of the United Methodist Church has developed a policy and associated guidelines to reduce the risk of abuse of children and youth in our church.

Jesus made the importance of children clear when he said, "Let the little children come to me, and do not stop them; for it is to such as these that the kingdom of heaven belongs." Emulating his example, the churches and their organizations, within the GNJAC has grown to be an important place for nurturing children and youth in faith.

The First United Methodist Church of Blairstown and this policy attempts to prayerfully and faithfully identify areas of risk and take steps to reduce that risk. This policy is in compliance with the Greater NJ Conference Safe Sanctuaries Policy, approved June 2005. This policy and the guidelines herein are to be followed by all persons, ministries and programs dealing with children, youth (under age 18) and vulnerable adults.

**Mandate for the Church:**

From Scripture: Matthew 18: 5-7 NRSV *"Whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me. If any of you put a stumbling block before one of these little ones who believe in me, 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. Woe to the world because of stumbling blocks! Occasions for stumbling are bound to come, but woe to the one by whom the stumbling block comes!"*

From Tradition:

- The United Methodist Hymnal Baptismal Covenant.
- From The United Methodist Discipline:
- Refer to The Book of Resolutions 1996, pages 384-386, "Reducing the Risk of Child Sexual Abuse in the Church
- From The Council of Bishops' Episcopal Initiative on Children and Poverty: "A Church for All God's Children," 1996 - 2004.

**Resources Consulted:**

- Resources at the Greater New Jersey Conference website ([www.gnjumc.org](http://www.gnjumc.org)) and the GNJAC Safe Sanctuaries Ministries.
- Safe Sanctuaries: Reducing the Risk of Abuse in the Church for Children and Adults Joy T. Melton (Discipleship Resources 2008)

**Scope of the Problem:**

When we think seriously about the promise we make in the baptismal service, we can only conclude that we are truly called to prevent child abuse in our churches. As Christians we are called to move beyond grieving about the issue to active efforts to eliminate the possibility of child and elder abuse everywhere, and most especially in our churches.

*Types of Abuse:* Physical (battery, shaking, kicking, choking, "non-accidental"), Emotional (spoken or unspoken violence or cruelty), Neglect (endangers child's safety, health, and welfare), Sexual (fondling, intercourse, incest, exploitation and/or exposure to pornography or prostitution), Ritual (regularly and intentionally inflicted, possibly done with an appeal to a higher power).

*It can Happen Anywhere:* The victim is never responsible for causing the abuse, and is never to be blamed. The child victim is never capable of consent to abusive behavior. Sexual abuse is ALWAYS wrong and is solely the responsibility of the abuser.

*Knowing the Facts:* Studies have estimated that 1 out of 3 girls are sexually abused before the age of 18. Estimates state that 1 out of 7 boys are sexually abused, but the actual number may be higher because of a reluctance to report occurrences.

*The Church at Risk* The risk for churches is especially high because we're seen as "trusting organizations" and we've been "notoriously INACTIVE when it comes to screening volunteers and/or employees who work with kids." Furthermore, churches routinely provide opportunities for close contact with children.

*Indicators of Child Abuse:* Children showing anxiety about coming to church or being left in a class or program, or reluctance to participate when he/she had previously been enthusiastic may be an indicator of abusive behaviors. Abused children may have fears of specific individuals experience nightmares, or show hostility.

*Abusers: Who Are They?:* Less than 20% are strangers - 93% of victims know their abuser. People who abuse children look and act just like everyone else. Those who sexually abuse children are drawn to settings where they can gain easy access to children, such as sports leagues, faith centers, clubs and schools.

*How Does Abuse Happen?* Victims are vulnerable, the abuser is powerful; without a comprehensive strategy against abuse, we are taking a needless risk that harm may be done to our children or vulnerable adults, or our workers with these populations. Strategies must be supported by the entire congregation and, applied to each worker involved in ministries with children and vulnerable adults. We need to think carefully about the safety of any one-adult/one-child situations. Look for group situations where possible. Set an example by personally avoiding one-adult/ one-child situations with children other than your own.

*Consequences of Sexual Abuse:* Many victims are created, including the abused, the congregation, the victim's family, and often the family of the abuser. Of foremost importance is the person who has been harmed; he or she must be cared for. The congregation's wounds may continue well beyond litigation – that doesn't provide healing among the members. Litigation can go on for two or more years. Financial consequences are somewhere around \$750,000 if innocent/at least \$1-2 million if proven guilty. No congregation can afford, financially, ethically, or morally, to fail to implement strategies for the reduction and prevention of sexual abuse.

*Greater NJ Conference Insurance:* All churches are covered because the Conference has a policy, and there is an expectation that every church and its programs, is implementing some type of policies and procedures. As is true with most situations, the extent of coverage varies, depending on what the local church has done to proactively prevent abuse from happening.

*Minimizing Opportunity for Abuse:* If you eliminate or reduce one-adult/one-child situations, you'll dramatically lower the risk of sexual abuse for your child. Expect programs to perform careful screening and background

checks on all persons working with children and vulnerable adults. Youth-serving organizations should have policies in place for dealing with suspicious situations and reports of abuse. Furthermore, these organizations should regularly train their staff to prevent, recognize and react responsibly to child sexual abuse.

**Worker Requirements:**

Screening and background checks shall be required of all persons involved in church children's programs and Ministries unless a more stringent check is required to satisfy the standards of a licensing agency. The GNJAC approved service (Trak-1) may be used for background checks as described on the GNJAC website ([www.gnjumc.org](http://www.gnjumc.org)). This service returns the following: (pick Child Protection Check or Child Protection plus Check (includes MVR))

- Social Security Check: Helps to verify that the name and social security number match.
- BroadScreen Criminal and Sex Offender Search : Accesses criminal conviction, sexual offender registry, US Secret Service, Drug Enforcement Administration, etc. across the United States. (Includes available counties in all 50 states plus Washington, D.C.)
- Motor Vehicle Report: provides driving history currently on file with the DMV. (Required only for those transporting children, youth, and/or vulnerable adults.)

**Requirements for paid staff, regular and occasional volunteers in children's programs and ministries:**

All regular paid and volunteer workers, lay and clergy, of GNJAC churches and its organizations must:

- Submit personal information for background check. Forms: Authorization for Background Check (through GNJAC) (Clergy through Board of Ordained Ministry Registrar)
- Complete interview and reference check. Forms: Position Interview Form, Reference Check Form (found in *Safe Sanctuaries* 2008)

**Handling of Interview, Screening and Background Information:**

It is a mandate of this policy that all interviews, screening and background information be handled according to the following guidelines to ensure privacy and confidentiality for all concerned.

**Volunteer Application Forms**

This form is mandated for all staff and volunteers working in church programs serving children, youth, and vulnerable adults. These screening forms are designed to assist the First UMC of Blairstown in gaining information on persons who are applicants for working in church programs with children, youth and vulnerable adults. Their use is designed to enhance the protection of those who participate in the programs. This document shall be kept in the volunteer's personnel file with completed Background Check reports. (found in *Safe Sanctuaries* 2008)

**Building Compliance Requirements:**

Safe Sanctuaries policy applies to all church operated programs for children, youth, or vulnerable adults. These programs must be clearly differentiated from those that are non-church operated.

The following are basic assumptions made as they relate to both church and non-church operated children, youth and vulnerable adult programs.

1. All buildings in which such programs are housed shall have any necessary "certificates of occupancy."
2. All groups conducting such programs shall have the necessary certificates of insurance for both liability and workers compensation. They shall be displayed as required by law.
3. All such programs shall conform to Federal and State wage and tax laws for employee.

**Basic Procedures for Safe Ministry with Children and Youth:**

All church children and youth programs should adhere to the following basic procedural guidelines.

- The "Two-Adult" Rule: 2 adults should be present at all times. Avoid all one adult-one child situations, such as closed-door bathroom breaks.
- The concept of “floater” is acceptable only when two adults cannot be present.
- First Aid/CPR Trained personnel available at all times.
- Annual Orientation: to remind all volunteers and paid staff of appropriate behavior; accepted policies and procedures.
- The "Five-Years-Older" Rule: Adults should be at least 5 years older than the oldest youth.
- Un-shaded windows in all classroom doors.
- Open-door counseling.
- Advance notice to parents about program events and activities.
- Parent and family education about abuse and the components of the Safe Sanctuaries Policy.
- Appropriate equipment and supervision for the setting and activity. Some settings or activities will require more supervision or expertise than others.
- Rules and guidelines for all church computers and internet activities.
- Transportation and sleeping arrangements for overnight trips must be thoughtfully planned out and be appropriate to the guideline found in the 2008 edition of *Safe Sanctuaries*.
- All Church computers should be password protected and should always be monitored when in use by children, youth and/vulnerable adults. Church Computers should only be used for ministry related purposes and should contain appropriate blocks from specific internet sites.

### **Congregational Plan for Responding to Allegations of Abuse:**

#### ***What should be reported?***

In New Jersey, any person having reasonable cause to believe that a child has been subjected to abuse or acts of abuse should immediately report this information to the State Central Registry (SCR). If the child is in immediate danger, call 911 as well as **1-877 NJ ABUSE (1-877-652-2873)**. A concerned caller does not need proof to report an allegation of child abuse and can make the report anonymously. (<http://www.nj.gov/dcf/about/divisions/dcpp/>)

CP&P is New Jersey's child protection/child welfare agency. It is their responsibility for investigating allegations of child abuse and neglect and if necessary, arranges for the child's protection and the family's treatment.

In addition, CP&P operates a 24-hour hotline to receive reports of suspected child abuse and neglect during evenings, weekends and holidays. This Office of Child Abuse Control (OCAC) is linked with a statewide network of Special Response Units who respond to emergency reports. .

#### ***Plan Summary***

This is a plan for complying with the legal reporting requirements and for making statements to other officials and the media. Only the pastor should be authorized to speak to the media on behalf of the congregation. Beyond the State's requirements, notify conference authorities including District Superintendent, Conference Coordinator of Children, Youth, and Young Adults, and the Resident Bishop.

#### ***Procedure Details***

Reporting:

- All complaints and allegations of child abuse occurring outside the church or church programs and activities should be reported to the CP&P Abuse Hotline as a citizen of New Jersey.
- All complaints and allegations of child abuse occurring inside the church or during a church program or activity should be directed to either the Children's Ministry Coordinator or the Pastor who will contact the appropriate authorities.

*Our job is not to try to investigate the suspected abuse, but to document the specifics that cause us to suspect abuse and to carefully report them. NJ Law does not require proof to call the hot line.*

Forms: Report Form for Suspected Incidents of Sexual or Physical Abuse;

Follow this procedure in response to a child's complaint or allegations of abuse occurring inside the church or during a church program or activity:

1. Remove person to safe place. The safety of the victim must be the Church's primary concern.
2. Do not confront the alleged abuser with anger and hostility - treat with dignity but immediately remove from further involvement.
3. Notify Authorities and document situation. Follow the steps below.
  - a. Call CP&P hotline: **1-877 NJ. ABUSE (1-877-652-2873)** - They will instruct you of the steps you should follow for the specific situation. For sexual abuse cases, CP&P will contact a local center and dispatch a trained interviewer to interview the child.
  - b. Call police: 911 (only if child is in immediate danger)
  - c. Call the Skylands District Superintendent.
4. Keep a written record of all steps taken in response to the allegation.

**Definition of Terms:**

**Vulnerable Adults:** Those adults with diminished physical, mental, or emotional capacities.

**Screening Forms:** Screening forms for use with volunteers are designed to assist the local church in gaining information on persons: who are applicants for working in church programs with children, youth and vulnerable adults. Their use is designed to enhance the protection of those who participated in the programs. The use of the screening process should be required in both "church" and "non-church" programs.

**Background Checks:** As with the screening forms background checks are designed to protect those individuals involved in the programs offered by the church to children, youth and vulnerable adults.

**Church Programs/Non-Church Programs:** (as related to insurance): Programs relating to children, youth and vulnerable adults are covered under the conference-wide Property and Casualty Insurance Program so long as they are church operated.

To be classified as "**church-operated**" the church must have control over

- Starting and stopping the operation,
- Hiring or firing the employees, and
- The management of the day-to-day operations.

The decision to operate a program, as described above, should be a matter of record in the meeting minutes of the Administrative Board or Board of Trustees of the local church. This will lie to rest the question of whether it is a church-operated or a non-church program that is using the church premises. The non-church program is not covered by the conference insurance and the church should be sure that these non-church programs carry a minimum of \$1,000,000 General Liability Insurance and are covered by Workers' Compensation insurance. Certificates of these insurance coverage's should be requested and received by the church annually. The Annual Conference and the local church should be named as additional insurers on these policies. The employees of church-operated childcare centers are covered under the Workers' Compensation Program and as such should be reported on the annual Workers' Compensation salary audit of the local church.

This policy was adapted from the Greater NJ Annual Conference Sample Safe Sanctuaries policy to fit the needs of the First United Methodist Church of Blairstown. For further questions or concerns, please contact the Greater NJ Annual Conference Safe Sanctuaries Coordinator at 732-359-1000, or the church office.