

# Zion United Methodist Church Safe Sanctuaries

## **INTRODUCTION**

The General Conference of the United Methodist Church, in April 1996, adopted a resolution aimed at reducing the risk of sexual abuse in the church. The adopted resolution includes the following statement:

Jesus said, "Whoever welcomes (a) child...welcomes me" (Matthew 18:5). Children, youth, and vulnerable adults 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, and sexual exploitation and abuse."

Tragically, churches have not always been safe places for children, youth, and vulnerable adults. 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, 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. Most annual conferences can cite specific incidents of 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 that are involved: the child, youth, or vulnerable adult, 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, youth, and other vulnerable persons from sexual and ritual abuse. God calls us to create communities of faith where children, youth, adults can grow safe and strong. *(From The Book of Resolutions of the United Methodist Church - 1996. Copyright 1996 by the United Methodist Publishing House. Used by permission. [Pp.384-386].)*

Thus, in covenant with all United Methodist congregations, we adopt this policy for the prevention of abuse of children, youth, and vulnerable adults in our church.

## **PURPOSE**

Our congregations' purpose for establishing this Abuse Prevention Policy and accompanying procedures is to demonstrate our absolute and unwavering commitment to the physical safety and spiritual growth of all of our children, youth, and vulnerable adults.

## **STATEMENT OF COVENANT**

Therefore, as a Christian community of faith and a United Methodist congregation, we pledge to conduct the ministry of the gospel in ways that assure the safety and spiritual growth of all of our children, youth, and vulnerable adults, as well as all of the workers with the children, youth, and vulnerable adults. We will follow responsible safety measures in the selection and recruitment of workers by:

- Requiring volunteer applications to be completed either in writing or orally with a designated person.
- Requiring Pennsylvania sexual abuse and criminal clearances for all adult workers with children, youth, and vulnerable adults.
- Requiring orientation and training for each volunteer or paid staff - appropriate for the position being held.

We will implement prudent operational procedures in all programs and events by:

- Requiring at least two (2) unrelated adults with each gathering of children, youth, and vulnerable adults. A "roaming" adult will be used when necessary.
- Requiring a "Five-Year-Older" rule (principle worker must be five (5) years older than the oldest student).
- Requiring that windows be in all classroom doors.
- Requiring permission slips and advance notice to parents for special events with personal/parental insurance information included for each participant.

We will educate all of our workers with children, youth, and vulnerable adults regarding the use of appropriate policies and methods by:

- Providing proper volunteer training and periodic refresher meetings.
- Encouraging training in First Aid and CPR (to be provided by the church).
- Following the GOD rules in the classroom:
  - Give your attention to the teacher
  - Only use kind words
  - Don't be a "space invader"

We will have a clearly defined procedure for reporting a suspected incident of abuse that conforms to the requirements of the state law, and we will be prepared to respond to media inquiries if an incident occurs.

## **CONCLUSION**

In all our ministries with children, youth, and vulnerable adults, Zion United Methodist Church is committed 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, Pp.44*).