

*John Wesley United Methodist Church  
Hagerstown, Maryland*

*Safe Sanctuary Policy  
Approved by  
The Administrative Council  
June 23, 2008*

**I. MANDATE & PURPOSE:**

At the 2007 Meeting of The Baltimore-Washington Conference of The United Methodist Church it was mandated that every church within the Conference would develop a Safe Sanctuary Plan to deal with the problem of Child Abuse within the life of the church. Each church was to develop its plan in the coming year and report its implementation at the 2008 session of the Annual Charge Conference. As a resource to the local church the Conference recommended the book, **Safe Sanctuaries- Reducing the Risk of Child Abuse in the Church** by The Rev. Joy Thornburg Melton, Esquire and brought Rev. Melton into the Conference to do a training seminar of which senior staff at John Wesley attended. Following the training, a committee consisting of the Senior Pastor, Program Director, Lay Leader, Administrative Council Chair, Staff-Parish Relations Chair, a representative of the Trustees, and our Health & Welfare Chairperson was convened to develop such a policy for John Wesley to be approved and Implemented by the Administrative Council.

The necessity for having such a plan, while being brought about by modern day circumstances that have made notorious headlines in the media, and done horrendous harm to innocent children have resulted in huge settlements being adjudicated against churches, organizations, and individuals, nonetheless, also have a Biblical and Theological mandate as well. This Biblical and Theological Mandate is spelled out in chapter two of Rev. Melton's book, **"For each baptism, our pastor begins the service by reading Jesus' words, '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' (Matthew 19: 14). The parents and the congregation are examined as to their willingness to raise the child (ren) in the way that leads to faith, the child is named and baptized, and then the child is presented to the congregation. At this point, the congregation assumes a holy responsibility as it replies, 'With God's help we will so order our lives after the example of Christ, that *this child* surrounded by steadfast love, may be established in the faith, and confirmed and strengthened in the way that leads to life eternal' (The United Methodist Hymnal, p. 44)."**

Based upon the above Biblical and Theological Mandate and with the knowledge that, **"Child abuse is criminal behavior and is punished severely in every state... (as) child sexual abuse exploits and harms children by involving them in sexual behavior**

for which they are unprepared, to which they cannot consent, and from which they are unable to protect themselves” (Safe Sanctuaries p. 13-14). John Wesley has implemented this plan with the following over-arching thesis: “**The child victim is never responsible for causing the abuse, and the child victim is never to be blamed for the abuse. The child victim is never capable of consent to abusive behavior, either legally or morally. Child sexual abuse is always wrong and is solely the responsibility of the abuser**” (Safe Sanctuaries p. 14).

## **II. Safe Sanctuary Policy as Related to Professional Staff:**

**A. Hiring and Screening Practices:** While the Senior Pastor (and any future pastors designated as “Associate Pastor”) are appointed by the presiding bishop of the Annual Conference and, thus, subject to the policies of the Conference and the Cabinet, all other staff positions are directly hired by the church and will be subject to the following practices:

1. All employees of the church will be hired by the Staff-Parish Relations Committee and while under the direct supervision of the Senior Pastor, will be accountable to them.
2. No employee of the church will be hired without having completed a written application which will include the providing of at least three references. Said application will be on a form approved by the Staff-Parish Relations Committee, reviewed by the designated members of the S. P. R. C. and if invited to be interviewed the applicant will interview with the S. P. R. C.’s designates. In addition, no employee will be hired by the church without having successfully completed a Criminal Background Check provided by a recognized professional organization of the S. P. R. C.’s choosing. If the background check turns up any red flags, they will be discussed by the full S. P. R. C. before the candidate is considered for hiring, with the exception being that *No one with a criminal charge on their record related to the abuse of any kind against a child will be eligible for hire.*
3. Upon employment by the church a personnel file will be established for the employee and maintained and updated as needed by the Senior Pastor. Such files will be maintained in a locked metal cabinet in the church office to which only the Senior Pastor and current S. P. R. C. Chair or a person designated by them for a specific purpose will have access.

## **B. Training and Continuing Education:**

1. All newly hired staff will be required to attend an Orientation session led by the Senior Pastor. This session will inform the hiree of the State of Maryland’s current requirement of the reporting of suspected Child Abuse and will require that the hiree certify in writing, both their understanding of the current state law and that they have read the Melton- “Safe Sanctuaries” Book or another approved by the Senior Pastor and the Staff-

Parish Relations Committee. During the orientation, hirees will also complete the form currently used by the Annual Conference to certify that they have never been accused in writing of any type of child abuse. **[Note: The Criminal Background Check will only show convictions, this asks for accusations even if never tried or convicted.]** If there had been accusations, the accusations will be reviewed by the S. P. R. C. immediately and the hiree will not be allowed to begin employment until after said review and then only with the 3/4<sup>th</sup> approval of the S. P. R. C.

2. All Staff will be required to take an **annual in-house refresher course** on the Melton Safe Sanctuaries Book or its successor and will be encouraged to take **on-going Continuing Education in the area of child abuse** through courses offered by the Annual Conference or in the community. **[Note: Any non-Conference Training must be approved by the Senior Pastor.]**

**C. The Church's Response to an Accusation of Abuse by a Staff Person:**

1. Any accusation of child abuse committed by a staff person should be put in writing on the current church Incident Report Form and immediately given to the Senior Pastor **[unless the accusation is against him/her in which case it shall be immediately given to the Staff-Parish Relations Chair who will immediately inform the District Superintendent ]**. If the Senior Pastor is not present the completed Incident Report form should be given to the pastor in charge during the Senior Pastor's absence who will then immediately contact the Senior Pastor.
2. Upon notification of the accusation of abuse by a staff member the Senior Pastor will immediately comply with current state of Maryland law in regards to reporting it to law enforcement authorities and/or Child Protective Services. He/she will then immediately inform the staff person of the accusation against him/her and advise the staff person that he/she are on immediate suspension and to cease and desist all of his/her duties and that he/she is to have no contact with the accuser and his/her family.
3. The Senior Pastor will then call an emergency meeting of the Staff Parish Relations Committee as well as inform the District Superintendent of the accusation.
4. It shall be the Responsibility of the Staff-Parish Relations Committee to do the following:
  - a- Assure that the church is in compliance with all reporting requirements to both the State and Annual Conference and, if necessary, obtain Legal Counsel. It shall also notify the Chair of the Board of Trustees who will notify the church's Insurance Carrier.
  - b- The S. P. R. C. will determine the accused staff person's status as to whether they are to be on paid or unpaid suspension, but in no case will allow them to return to work until after a full and satisfactory outcome of the legal investigation. **Every effort will be made to**

**provide reasonable care for the staff person and his/her family without compromising the investigation and in all cases the S. P. R. C. will be bound by the overarching thesis of this policy stated in Section 1- “Mandate & Purpose”- and which holds that the victim is “never to be blamed, that children can never give consent to abusive behavior by an adult, and will recognize that abuse is always wrong and the sole responsibility of the abuser.”**

- c- The S. P. R. C. will designate a spokesperson for the church who will be the only person allowed to speak for the church to any Media inquiries. Before issuing any statements the spokesperson should become familiar with Chapter 4 of the Melton book or the appropriate chapter in any currently used book that details the church’s response. The Spokesperson must also be well versed in the church’s Safe Sanctuary Policy. The S. P. R. C. will also have said spokesperson prepare a written statement for the entire congregation about the accusation and the church’s response, but “without giving unnecessary details, placing blame, interfering with the victim’s privacy, or violating any confidentiality concerns\*” [\* Safe Sanctuaries-p. 41].**

### **III. Safe Sanctuary Policy as Related to Volunteers:**

**A. Recruiting and Screening Practices:** All Volunteers recruited to work with children & youth shall be recruited by either the staff of the church or the Lay Leadership Development Committee, but **in all cases must be over the age of 18 and at least 5 years older than the children/youth that they will be working with if in a lead capacity. This will not apply to volunteer helpers except that they must be at least 13 years old. In no case will a volunteer be recruited who has not attended the church on a regular basis for a minimum of six months.**

1. All volunteer children and youth workers will be under the supervision of church Professional Staff and all will be accountable to both the Senior Pastor and the Lay Leadership Development Committee.
2. No volunteer will be recruited without having completed a written application which will include at least three references. Said application will be on a form approved by the Lay Leadership Development Committee and the candidate must be approved by the Senior Pastor. In addition to the written application, the candidate will also complete the current Annual Conference Questionnaire related to accusations of child abuse and annually thereafter. **If there has been any accusation in the past the form will be reviewed by the Senior Pastor and the Staff Parish Relations Committee before the volunteer is allowed to work with children or youth. The Senior Pastor and the Staff Parish Relations Committee will determine**

**the volunteer's eligibility except in such case where a conviction occurred and then the candidate will automatically be ineligible.**

3. In addition to the above, all candidates will be further reviewed by the Senior Pastor or his/her designee who will search the Internet for local states and or previous states of the candidate's residency Sexual Offender Web Sites to be sure that the candidate's are not registered sex offenders, which, again, would preclude their recruitment.

## **B. Training and Orientation:**

1. All newly recruited volunteers will be required to undergo an initial orientation conducted by church staff. Such orientation will inform them of the State of Maryland's current requirement on the reporting of suspected child abuse and will require their certifying in writing their understanding of the current state law as well as their understanding of a copy of the current Safe Sanctuary Policy that will be provided to them in advance.
2. All volunteers working with children & youth will be required to attend an annual training provided by church staff as a refresher course and update on the church's Safe Sanctuary and other policies.

## **C. The Church's Response to an Accusation of Abuse by a Volunteer:**

1. **The Church's Response to an Accusation of Abuse by a Volunteer shall be the same as its response to an accusation against professional staff as outlined in Section II- C above except in regards to salary continuance which is not applicable.**

## **IV. Basic Procedures for Safe Ministry with Children & Youth:**

### **A. John Wesley Commits itself to the following "Basic Procedures":**

1. **"The Two Adult Rule"**: The church will immediately begin working toward the goal that no church activity involving children and youth are to take place without the presence of two adults, preferably unrelated. Until this goal is fully reached, no such activity will take place without the knowledge of the Church's Senior Pastor who will designate a staff person to monitor it
2. **First Aid/C. P. R. Training**: Such training will be offered annually.
3. **"The Five Years Older Rule"**: See Section III-A Above
4. **No Workers Under the Age of 18:** " " " "

5. **Windows in All Class Room Doors:** Each room set aside for children and youth should have a door with a window in it or a half door.
6. **Open Door Counseling:** At any counseling sessions involving children and youth the door of the room will remain open for the entire session anytime when someone is present within walking but not listening distance.
7. **Advance Notice to Parents:** Parents will be given advance notice and full information regarding the events in which their children will participate and if only one adult will be present, however, briefly during the event parental permission must be given in writing in advance
8. **Participation Covenant for All Participants and Leaders:** Efforts will be made to provide participants in children & youth ministries with a covenant statement in which leaders and participants will covenant to take part, give their best efforts to the ministry, respect the other participants.
9. **Parent and Family Education:** The church will at least annually, preferably during annual orientations, bring in outside professionals to educate parents and children on Child Abuse.
10. **Covenant with the Trustees:** The Trustees of the church will covenant to provide to the best of their ability appropriate equipment and a safe building for all events related to children and youth and to assure adequate Insurance protection.
11. **Covenant with the S. P. R. C.:** **The Staff Parish Relations Advisory Committee will covenant to oversee that Church Staff is monitoring all events involving children and youth to see that they are adequately supervised.**
12. **Additional Requirements for the Cribbery:** The Trustees will provide a paging system to allow the Cribbery attendant to notify parents when they are needed. Church Staff will design a “sign-in-sign-out” policy to properly identify who is to have access to the children.

V. **Outside Groups Involving Children & Youth:** All outside groups using the church must be made aware of the church’s Safe Sanctuary Policy and certify in writing that they understand it and will abide by it. Where the policy provides for specific church related forms the group will either use them or certify that they have their own which meet or exceed the church’s requirements. Seeing that such compliance is done will be the responsibility of the Senior Pastor.

VI. **Ongoing Review:** The Church Staff in consultation with the Staff-Parish Relations and Lay Leadership Development Committee will annually review the Safe-Sanctuary Policy to assure it is being followed and to offer any amendments to be approved by the Administrative Council.