

Safe Sanctuary Policy

Volunteer

Zachary United Methodist Church

REV 08/14/2024

Children and Youth Ministries

PREAMBLE God has called us to make our ministries safe, protecting our children, youth and vulnerable adults from abuse and exploitation. God has also called us to create communities of faith where children, youth and vulnerable adults can be safe and grow strong. Jesus taught that “Whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me,” (Mark 9:37 NRSV) and “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 NRSV). The Social Principles of the United Methodist Church state that “...children must be protected from economic, physical, and sexual exploitation and abuse.” At each child’s baptism, we affirm our responsibility to their safety by our congregational response, pledging: “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.” (From The Book of Worship, Baptismal Covenant, Congregational Pledge II) Building on these foundations, we recognize that our faith calls us to offer hospitality and protection to all children, youth and vulnerable adults, as well as those who are committed to ministering to them as volunteers and employees. Every 15 seconds, a child is abused or neglected. Often, abuse occurs in places where children and youth feel safe – homes, schools, camps, and even churches. In over three quarters of reported cases, the victim was related to or acquainted with the abuser. In light of this, the Annual Conference of the United Methodist Church and Zachary United Methodist Church has seen fit to outline policy and procedures that can 1) prevent such abuse from happening in our church; 2) be a place where children can feel safe in disclosing abuse; 3) protect the loyal volunteers and employees that minister to our children, youth and vulnerable adults. Building on the Safe Sanctuaries policies established by the Annual Conference, Zachary United Methodist Church has incorporated within its Safe Sanctuaries policies additional measures to further protect our children and youth.

I. Definitions

- *Child* Age 11 or under.
- *Youth* Under 18 years of age or an 18 year-old high school student.
- *Adult* 18 years of age or older and no longer in high school
- *Child/Youth Abuse* For purposes of this Policy, child/youth abuse includes any of the following:
 - *Physical Abuse* Violent non-accidental contact which results in injury. This includes, but is not limited to, striking, biting, or shaking. Injuries include bruises, fractures, cuts, and burns.
 - *Sexual Abuse* Any form of sexual activity with a child/youth, whether at the Church, at home, or any other setting. The abuser may be an adult, an adolescent, or another minor.
 - *Emotional Abuse* A pattern of intentional conduct which crushes a child’s/youth’s spirit attacks his/her self-worth through rejection, threats, terrorizing, isolating, or belittling
 - *Neglect* – Abuse in which a person endangers a child/youth’s health, safety, or welfare through negligence. Examples are – withholding food, clothing, medical care

Volunteers

1. Regular Volunteers: All Sunday School Teachers (Adult, Children's and Youth classes) and all volunteers who regularly work with children and youth

- Must be an adult
- Must complete the Volunteer Application
- Must be a parent of a child or youth within the church and/or known by the responsible Church staff and approved by the Pastor
- Must have been an active participant of Zachary United Methodist Church for at least six months. Or have documentation from their Pastor that they are an active participant of another Church for at least six months.
- Must Read and Acknowledge the Volunteer Safe Sanctuary Policy and understand their responsibility
- Must Follow the Procedures defined in this policy.
- Must be Supervised by the responsible Church Staff
- Complete all Required Ministry Safe Training

2. Occasional Volunteers: All volunteers who are used only in occasional situations.(e.g., Vacation Bible School, Safe Person, festivals, etc.)

- Must be an adult
- Must be known and recommended by a parent of a child or youth or by a church staff
- Must complete the Adult Volunteer Application
- Read and Acknowledge the Safe Sanctuary Policy and understand their responsibility
- Must Follow the Procedures defined in this policy
- Must be supervised by a regular volunteer or responsible Church staff.
- Complete Required Ministry Safe Training

Requirement of all Personnel

- **Prior Convictions** Individuals who have been convicted of physical or sexual abuse or neglect may not work in any church-sponsored activity or program for preschoolers, children, youth or vulnerable adults.

- **Confidentiality of Information** The church will keep confidential all information received in the applicant selection process. Selection information will be marked as such and stored in a locked location with limited access afforded only to church staff and others with a need to know. The Pastor and Staff to Families with Youth and Children are responsible for the implementation of these policies as well as the maintenance of confidential records.

Social Media

The use of electronics or media communications may be useful tools in supporting ministries with children, youth, and other vulnerable people. However, in such circumstances, the following requirements shall be met:

- The volunteer or staff person shall never initiate a connection (friending, following, etc.) on social media.
- If a student initiates a connection, the child, youth, or vulnerable person's parent or guardian as well as the pastor in charge shall be notified.
- If an adult leader receives a private text from a child, youth, or vulnerable person that seems to be questionable, the adult leader should immediately end the conversation in the virtual space and offer opportunities to have the conversation in person and in compliance with the earlier

guidelines for one-on-one conversations. The ministry supervisor and/or parent/guardian should be made aware of the incident immediately.

Note: If an in-person meeting is not possible, those involved will determine the most reasonable alternative in compliance with the earlier guidelines for one-on-one conversations.

- Adult leaders should post photos on social network sites only with prior written permission granted by a parent/guardian. When posted, PHOTOS MUST NOT BE TAGGED with names or location indicators. All photos must be appropriate and in keeping with the spirit of the ministry event.
- All in-person protection policies apply to online platform meetings like Zoom, Skype, Messenger, and so on. (For example, two unrelated adults should be present in the virtual room just as they would be in a physical room.)
- An official church account should be established and used for online activities, not a personal account.
- Communication about online meetings should be shared with parents/guardians as well as with children, youth, and other vulnerable people.
- Adult leaders and participants should use their real names as usernames.
- Attendance of online meetings should be documented.
- All electronic communications shall be documented and retained.

Reporting Abuse Responsibility

Reporting is required by any staff or a volunteer that personally witnesses an incident of abuse or exploitation, when an allegation of an event of abuse or exploitation is made to staff or a volunteer by a third party and/or when a child or vulnerable adult discloses abuse or exploitation to staff or a volunteer. It is crucial that reporting be immediate and the allegations dealt with as soon in time as possible to the incident or disclosure.

- The Paid staff person or volunteer who observes alleged abuse or to whom such alleged abuse is reported or disclosed, or who suspects abuse is required to report the incident/suspected abuse immediately to the person in charge of the ministry/activity.
- The person in charge of the ministry/activity in which the alleged abuse was observed or disclosed shall immediately attempt to obtain necessary information such as the name of the alleged victim and his/her address and family information.
- **The Pastor is to be informed immediately.**
- Upon receiving such information, the person in charge of the ministry/activity or the Pastor should report the alleged abuse to the Louisiana Department of Children and Family Services at 1-855-4LA-KIDS (1-855-452-5437) and/or law enforcement.
- If the accused is the appointed clergy, supply pastor or a member of his/her family, the allegations shall be immediately reported to the District Superintendent. The District Superintendent shall immediately report to the proper authorities as set forth in paragraph 1 above. The District Superintendent will take responsibility and act according to established rules of The Book of Discipline with respect to claims against a pastor. If the District Superintendent is not available, the incident should be reported to the Bishop's office.
- All clergy are included in mandatory reporting as required by The Book of Discipline and Louisiana state law. ¶341.5 All clergy of The United Methodist Church are charged to

maintain all confidences inviolate, including confessional confidences, except in the cases of suspected child abuse or neglect or in cases where mandatory reporting is required by civil law.

Any mandatory reporter who has cause to believe that a child/youth's physical or mental health or welfare is endangered as a result of abuse or neglect or that abuse or neglect was a contributing factor in a child/youth's death shall report in accordance with Article 610. Violation of the duties imposed upon a mandatory reporter subjects the offender to criminal prosecution authorized by R.S. 14:403(A) *See* La. Ch. C. art. 603, 609.

- After the person in charge of the ministry/activity has reported the suspected abuse to the proper authorities, the appointed clergy/supply pastors are to report the incident immediately to the District Superintendent. If the District Superintendent is unavailable, the incident should be reported to the Bishop's office.
- The person in charge of the ministry/event must keep a written report of the steps taken by the Church in response to the reported abuse. The report should be brief and contain only factual information relevant to the situation. It should be kept in a secure place. It should be written in ink or typed to prevent it from being changed.

For All Church Staff and Volunteers in Adult Ministries

Sexual Harassment Policy

The Zachary United Methodist Church affirms The 2004 Book of Resolutions, Sexual Abuse Within the Ministerial Relationship and Sexual Harassment Within the Church, which states: "Those in positions of authority in the church, both clergy and lay, have been given much responsibility, vested with a sacred trust to maintain an environment that is safe for people to live and grow in God's love. Misconduct of a sexual nature inhibits the full and joyful participation of all in the community of God. Sexual misconduct in church and ministry settings impedes the mission of Jesus Christ. Ministerial leaders have the responsibility not only to avoid actions and words which hurt others, but also to protect the vulnerable against actions or words which cause harm." In accordance with The 2004 Book of Discipline, ¶161F, all human beings, both male and female, are created in the image of God, and thus have been made equal in Christ. As the promise of Galatians 3:26-29, states all are one in Christ, we support equity among all persons without regard to ethnicity, situation, or gender.

Sexual abuse within the ministerial relationship occurs when a person within a ministerial role of leadership (pastor, educator, counselor, youth leader, or other position of leadership) engages in sexual contact or sexualized behavior with a congregant, client, employee, student, staff member, co-worker, or volunteer.

Sexual harassment is "any unwanted sexual comment, advance or demand, either verbal or physical, that is reasonably perceived by the recipient as demeaning, intimidating, or coercive. Sexual harassment must be understood as an exploitation of a power relationship rather than as an exclusively sexual issue. Sexual harassment includes, but is not limited to, the creation of a hostile or abusive working environment resulting from discrimination on the basis of gender." (Book of Discipline ¶161I).

Gender harassment is behavior that is harassing in nature against a woman because she is a woman and against a man because he is a man.

Sexual abuse within the ministerial relationship involves a betrayal of sacred trust, a violation of the ministerial role, and exploitation of those who are vulnerable. Similarly, gender or sexual harassment are usually understood as exploitations of power relationships rather than as exclusively sexual or gender issues.

Sexual and gender harassment, sexual abuse and misconduct of a sexual nature within the life of the church interfere with its moral mission. Zachary United Methodist Church prohibits and will not tolerate these behaviors, which are sinful, demeaning, abusive, and wrong. The Zachary United Methodist Church commits itself to fair and expedient investigation of any complaint of sexual and gender harassment, sexual abuse or misconduct of a sexual nature within the church and to take action deemed appropriate and in compliance with the Book of Discipline. Further, the Zachary United Methodist Church bears affirmative responsibility to create an environment of hospitality for all persons, male or female, which is free of these sins and encourages respect, equality, and kinship in Christ.

The Zachary United Methodist Church will not retaliate against any person who brings forward a complaint. All staff leaders and members are expected to immediately report any knowledge of harassment, abuse, or misconduct to any one of these persons: Pastor, Chair SPRC/PPR, District Superintendent or Bishop. Prompt and appropriate investigation and corrective action will be taken, including discipline. Persons who make false accusations will be disciplined.

While the Zachary United Methodist Church cannot guarantee absolute confidentiality, it will make every reasonable effort to maintain confidentiality by disclosing information about the complaint only on a "need to know" basis and as necessary to promote God's call for justice, reconciliation, and healing.

Anyone who has any questions or concerns about this policy or the issues addressed is encouraged to air those questions or concerns to the PPRC or SPRC.

II. Transportation Guidelines

- All drivers must have a current, valid driver's license, proof of insurance at the State minimum limits, a mechanically sound and inspected vehicle, and must not be otherwise disqualified from driving.
- All passengers must have safety restraints and all traffic laws must be obeyed.
- Safe Driving expectations
 - Use a seat belt at all times—driver and passenger(s).
 - Be well-rested before driving.
 - Avoid taking medications that make you drowsy.
 - If you are impaired by alcohol or any drug, do not drive.
 - Avoid distractions, such as texting, adjusting the radio or other controls, eating or drinking, and talking on the phone.
- Where feasible a minimum of three adults should be in the vehicle.
 - Two adults may be in a vehicle when:
 - Traveling via caravan or
 - Having a 3rd party observe and document accurate departure and arrival times.
 - Exception, this shall not apply when all occupants of the vehicle are family members.