

# SAFE SANCTUARIES ABUSE PREVENTION POLICY For Conference & District Events of the Oregon-Idaho Annual Conference of The United Methodist Church (Adopted by the 2008 Annual Conference Session)

## INTRODUCTION

Our hope and belief today is that the church is a place where all people will find the unconditional love and care they so desperately need to grow and thrive. But, we know that abuse occurs in churches, large and small, urban and rural. It is a problem, which cuts across all economic, cultural, and racial lines. In April 1996, the General Conference of The United Methodist Church adopted a resolution aimed at reducing the risk of abuse of children, youth, and vulnerable adults in the church. It was renewed by the 2004 General Conference (Resolution 65, "Reducing the Risk of Child Sexual Abuse in Churches, pg. 201, 2004 Book of Resolutions). As Christians we must take our responsibilities to our children, youth, and vulnerable adults very seriously. While we may not be able to completely prevent abuse in every situation, it is possible for us to greatly reduce the risk by following a policy of prevention. We are responsible to create an environment of safe sanctuary for children, youth and vulnerable adults, and those who work with them. Thus we establish this Abuse Prevention Policy to demonstrate our absolute and unwavering commitment to the safety of all our children, youth, and vulnerable adults.

## PURPOSE

It is the purpose of this policy to 1) protect from abuse the children, youth, and vulnerable adults that participate in church activities, and 2) protect our staff, both paid and volunteer, from unfounded and/or malicious allegations of abuse through a comprehensive plan that includes: screening, training, supervision, reporting procedures, and a response plan.

## SCOPE

This policy shall be applicable to all Conference and District activities or events involving children, youth, and vulnerable adults within ministry settings of the Oregon-Idaho Annual Conference.

## DEFINITIONS

- **Abuse:** intentional, negligent, or reckless behavior by a volunteer or staff person that is harmful, injurious, or offensive.
  - **Child Abuse** – an act committed by a parent, caregiver, or person in a position of trust, which is not accidental and which harms or threatens a child's physical or mental health or a child's welfare.
  - **Physical Abuse** – when an adult injures a child by accident, including assault, shaking, slapping, burning, scalding, kicking and strangling.

**Sexual Abuse** - sexual contact between an adult or other significantly older, more powerful person and a child, youth, or vulnerable adult. It includes behavior such as inappropriate verbal stimulation, taking or showing sexually explicit photos of or to a child, or exposing a child to pornography or adult sexual activity.

**Emotional Abuse** – verbal assault or emotional cruelty that affects a child's self esteem.

- **Adult:** a person 18 years old or older.
- **Activities:** any activity or programs in which children, youth, or vulnerable adults are under supervision of staff persons or volunteers.
- **Background Checks:** Researching references and records for indications of past or potential abusive and/or criminal activity.
- **Child:** person from birth until they turn 12 years old.
- **Conference:** The Oregon-Idaho Annual Conference of The United Methodist Church.
- **District:** The level of church organization between the Conference and the local church. There are five Districts in the Oregon-Idaho Annual Conference; Central, Eastern, Metropolitan, Southern, and Western.
- **Ministry setting:** In general, the term “ministry setting” refers to chartered local churches, unchartered fellowships, cooperative parishes, campus ministries and camp sites.
- **Person-in-Charge (PIC):** Staff person or volunteer who is the person responsible for the event or activity.
- **Staff person:** any person employed by the Conference or District that is responsible for activities involving children, youth, or vulnerable adults.
- **Volunteer:** a person who assists in conducting activities under the supervision of person(s) in charge.
- **Vulnerable Adults:** any person 18 years of age or older with diminished physical, mental, or emotional capacities.
- **We:** The Oregon-Idaho Annual Conference.
- **Youth:** any person 12 years old to his/her 18th birthday.

## SCREENING PROCEDURES

Careful screening can be important to the prevention of abuse. It provides some assurance that the most reliable, committed and experienced staff and volunteers are in place for every program that involves children, youth, and vulnerable adults. The following are the MINIMUM standards:

1. All adults, volunteer or staff persons, who have regular and direct contact with children, youth, and vulnerable adults shall be required to complete the “Voluntary Disclosure” form.
2. Minimum background screenings shall include:
  - a) Reference checks from Voluntary Disclosure form.

- b) Review of the Oregon and Idaho lists of sexual offenders or State or National criminal background checks.
3. The policy shall be implemented in the following manner:
    - a) All staff persons and volunteers, who have regular and direct contact with children, youth, and vulnerable adults will submit to the screening procedures.
    - b) The screening procedure shall be repeated every five years.
    - c) The person in charge of the event and/or their designee is responsible for review and approving each application before a person's service begins.
    - d) All records are confidential and will be maintained for a period of at least five years.

## SUPERVISION

Competent and trained staff and volunteers are important to any event. The procedures described below are designed to reduce the possibility of abuse to children, youth and vulnerable adults, and to protect staff persons and volunteers from unfounded accusations.

The following are MINIMUM standards and each event may adopt more stringent requirements if necessary.

1. Training is required for all persons having direct contact with children, youth, and vulnerable adults. Training shall include an annual orientation that includes information about this Policy, supervision of children, youth, and vulnerable adults, and identification and reporting of abuse.
2. Call children, youth and vulnerable adults will be supervised by adults. No adult will be alone with any one child, youth or vulnerable adult out of sight of others.
3. No person shall supervise any group of children or youth unless he/she is AT LEAST 5 years older than the children or youth.

## REPORTING

Once an incident of abuse is recognized, it is crucial that it be dealt with speedily and in a clearly outlined manner. The adult who observes or hears of an alleged abuse shall:

1. Assure the safety of the victim. Take whatever the victim says very seriously. Make sure that the victim is in a safe place and watched over. Do not confront the accused abuser with anger or hostility but immediately remove him/ her from further involvement with children and youth until the matter can be investigated. Notify the proper authorities.
2. If there is a situation of immediate risk call the police at 911, otherwise follow the procedure as listed below:
  - a) Report the incident immediately to the Person-in-Charge (PIC) of the event or activity in which the incident occurred.
  - b) The PIC shall:
    - i) Ascertain the details needed to make an accurate report. This report must be made within 24 hours. The report should include the following information if obtainable:
      - The name, address, age and sex of the alleged victim;
      - The name and address of the alleged victim's parents or other person responsible for his/her care;
      - The nature and extent of the alleged abuse or neglect;

- Any evidence of previously known or suspected abuse or neglect of the alleged victim or their siblings;
  - The name, address and relationship, if known, of the person who is alleged to have perpetrated the abuse or neglect; and
  - Any other information known to the person making the report that would be helpful to the investigation of the alleged abuse.
- ii) Contact the appropriate State or law enforcement agency as soon as possible to file the abuse report and provide the aforementioned information and follow the instructions of the agency.
- iii) Notify one of those trained and designated by the Conference to respond to reports of abuse as listed in the Crisis Communications Plan.

The alleged perpetrators of the abuse will be required to refrain from all events involving children, youth and vulnerable adults until the incident report is resolved. In any removal of a person from any activities, care must be taken to handle this in a discreet manner, recognizing that an investigation is being conducted.

## RESPONSE PLAN

- A quick, compassionate and unified response to an alleged incident of abuse is expected. All allegations will be taken seriously. In all cases of reported or observed abuse in an activity, the entire staff of that activity shall be at the service of all official investigating agencies.
- Follow the procedures outlined in the Crisis Communications Plan, [When a Crisis Strikes...Are You Ready?](#)
- Pastoral support shall be available and offered to all persons involved with the incident.

## TRAINING

The Conference shall develop and implement training and orientation procedures for persons in leadership who work with children, youth, and vulnerable adults in local ministry settings within the Annual Conference. Training shall include but is not limited to this policy and its related procedures.

## POLICY REVIEW

This policy shall be reviewed annually by the Board of Trustees of the Oregon-Idaho Annual Conference, leaders of ministries covered by these policies and the Conference Chancellor. Modifications will be made subject to the approval of the Conference Leadership Team. All such modifications will be promptly conveyed in writing to all persons affected by the modification.

## CONCLUSION

In all of our ministries we are committed to demonstrating the love of Jesus Christ so that each child, youth, and vulnerable adult is “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*, pg 44). This policy and associated procedures are effective as of July 1, 2008.

## FOR ASSISTANCE

For assistance with implementing the Safe Sanctuary policy, consider the following recommended resources:

- 1) Safe Sanctuaries: Reducing the Risk of Child Abuse in the Church by Joy Thornburg Melton
- 2) The Oregon-Idaho Annual Conference “Crisis Communication” booklet
- 3) Voluntary Disclosure Form posted on [www.umi.org](http://www.umi.org) website
- 4) Sex Offender Registry websites –
  - a) Oregon: <http://sexoffenders.oregon.gov>
  - b) Idaho: [www.isp.state.id.us/sor\\_id](http://www.isp.state.id.us/sor_id)
  - c) National (*does not include all states, including OR and ID*): [www.nsopr.gov](http://www.nsopr.gov)
- 5) Background Check Services: For questions or information about Trak 1, the background check service on contract with the annual conference, contact Bill Mulette-Bauer, Director of Stewardship and Finances.