

SAFE SANCTUARIES ABUSE PREVENTION POLICY

**of the Oregon-Idaho Annual Conference
of The United Methodist Church**

(Adopted by the 2008 Annual Conference Session)

MINIMUM STANDARDS FOR ABUSE PREVENTION POLICIES OF LOCAL MINISTRY SETTINGS

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 the Oregon-Idaho Annual Conference has established for its local ministry settings these minimum standards for abuse prevention to demonstrate our concern for and commitment to the safety of all our children, youth, and vulnerable adults.

POLICY

All local ministry settings of the annual conference need to have an Abuse Prevention (aka "Safe Sanctuaries") Policy. All employees and volunteers covered by the policy are to be trained on the policy. The policy shall be reviewed annually by the appropriate body and revised as necessary. Update trainings are necessary for all employees and volunteers following any revisions to the policy.

PURPOSE

The purpose of these minimum standards is to establish a basic level of abuse prevention in ministry settings across the annual conference, regardless of size, location, or average age of membership. In many cases, higher standards for abuse prevention can be instituted and should be. But these minimum standards are expected of all local ministry settings as they develop their own abuse prevention policies that will: 1) protect from abuse the children, youth, and vulnerable adults that participate in church activities, and 2) protect 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

These minimum standards for abuse prevention shall be applicable to all ministry settings within the Oregon-Idaho Annual Conference that involve children, youth, and vulnerable adults. In general, the term “ministry settings” refers to chartered local churches, unchartered fellowships, cooperative parishes, campus ministries and camp sites.

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.
- **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 local ministry setting 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.

MINIMUM STANDARDS FOR 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 for screening procedures to be incorporated into ministry setting abuse prevention policies:

1. All adults, volunteer or staff persons, who have regular and direct contact with children, youth, and vulnerable adults shall be required to complete an application including voluntary disclosure of information including legal name and other names previously used, date of birth, and voluntary disclosure of any convictions of abusive behavior.
2. Minimum background screenings shall include:
 - a) Reference checks from application form.
 - b) Review of the Oregon and Idaho lists of sexual offenders or State or National criminal background checks.
3. At minimum, ministry setting abuse prevention policies shall incorporate the following:
 - 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) Reviewing bodies shall be established (ex: Pastor/Staff Parish Relations Committee, Education or Nurture Committee, or other organized body).
 - c) The reviewing body is responsible for review and approval of each application before a person's service begins.
 - d) The screening procedure for each individual shall be repeated every five years.
 - e) All records are confidential and will be maintained for a period of at least five years.
 - f) The ministry setting will not knowingly hire anyone with a history of committing sexual abuse on any child, youth, or vulnerable adult.

MINIMUM STANDARDS FOR SUPERVISION

Competent and trained staff and volunteers are important to any activity or program in the local church or ministry setting. 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 for supervision to be incorporated into ministry setting policies:

1. Required training for all persons having direct contact with children, youth, and vulnerable adults. Training shall include an annual orientation that includes information about the local ministry setting abuse prevention policy.
2. Our standard practice is that all children, youth, and vulnerable adults will be supervised by adults. Our standard practice is that no adult will be alone with any one child, youth, or vulnerable adult out of sight of others. The minimum standard is an open space (open door, window, etc) such that activities can be observed. In addition, an adult is assigned to periodically observe the activities.

3. No person shall supervise any age group of children or youth unless he/she is AT LEAST 5 years older than the children or youth.

MINIMUM STANDARDS FOR REPORTING AND RESPONSE

Once an incident of abuse is recognized, it is crucial that it be dealt with speedily and in a clearly outlined manner. 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 a program or activity, all persons involved in the program or activity shall be at the service of all official investigating agencies. Pastoral support shall be available and offered to persons involved in the incident.

The following are the MINIMUM standards for reporting and responding to potential abuse to be incorporated into ministry setting policies:

1. The adult who observes or hears of an alleged abuse shall:
 - a. Assure the safety of the victim.
 - i) Whatever the victim says is to be taken very seriously.
 - ii) Make sure that the victim is in a safe place and watched over.
 - iii) 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.
 - b. If there is a situation of immediate risk, call the police at 911. Otherwise report the incident immediately to the pastor and/or other persons designated by the ministry setting.
2. The pastor or designee shall:
 - a. Ascertain the details needed to make an accurate report.
 - b. Within 24 hours, write an incident report. The report should include the following information, if obtainable:
 - (1) The name, address, age and sex of the alleged victim;
 - (2) The name and address of the alleged victim's parents or other person responsible for his/her care;
 - (3) The nature and extent of the alleged abuse or neglect;
 - (4) Any evidence of previously known or suspected abuse or neglect of the alleged victim or their siblings;
 - (5) The name, address and relationship, if known, of the person who is alleged to have perpetrated the abuse or neglect; and
 - (6) Any other information known to the person making the report that would be helpful to the investigation of the alleged abuse.
 - c. 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.
 - d. Report the suspected child abuse to the child's family and any agencies required by law.
3. The alleged perpetrators of the abuse are to be excluded from future 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.

MINIMUM STANDARD FOR TRAINING

The MINIMUM standard for training to be incorporated into ministry setting policies is that each local church or ministry setting shall implement or participate in training and orientation procedures for persons in leadership who work with children, youth, and vulnerable adults. Training shall include but is not limited to the local ministry setting's abuse prevention policy and its related procedures.

MINIMUM STANDARD FOR POLICY REVIEW

The MINIMUM standard for policy review to be incorporated into ministry setting policies is that the abuse prevention policy in each ministry setting shall be reviewed annually.

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). The minimum standards for abuse prevention policies of ministry settings are effective as of July 1, 2008. They will be reviewed on an annual basis in a manner determined by the Conference Leadership Team. 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.

FOR ASSISTANCE

For assistance with establishing and implementing a ministry setting 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 website
- 4) Sex Offender Registry websites –
 - a) Oregon: <http://sexoffenders.oregon.gov>
 - b) Idaho: www.isp.state.id.us/sor_id
 - c) National (*does not include all states, including OR and ID*): 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.