

PPUMC Safe Sanctuaries Policy

INTRODUCTION

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

Jesus said, "Whoever welcomes (a) child. Welcomes *me*." (Matthew 18:5). Children are our present and our future, our hope, our teachers, our invitation- 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. Child 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, both 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. Many annual conferences can cite specific incidents of child sexual 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 who are involved: the child, 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 and other vulnerable persons *from* sexual and ritual abuse.

God calls us to create communities of faith where children and adults 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 child abuse in our church.

PURPOSE

Our congregation's purpose for establishing this Child 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 and youth.

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STATEMENT OF COVENANT

Therefore, as a Christian community of faith and a United Methodist congregation, Pittman Park United Methodist Church (hereafter referred to as PPUMC) pledges to conduct the ministry of the gospel in ways that assure the safety and spiritual growth of all of our children and youth as well as all of the workers with children and youth. We will follow reasonable safety measures in the selection and recruitment of workers; we will implement prudent operational procedures in all programs and events; we will educate all of our workers with children and youth regarding the use of all appropriate policies and methods (including first aid and methods of discipline); we will have a clearly defined procedure for reporting a suspected incident of abuse that conforms to the requirements of state law; and we will be prepared to respond to media inquiries if an incident occurs.

CONCLUSION

In all of our ministries with children and youth, this congregation is committed to demonstrating the love of Jesus Christ so that each child 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*, p. 44)

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1. Volunteers:

- a) Must complete Safe Sanctuary Training Class every 2 years.
- b) Must undergo a satisfactory Criminal History Check
- c) All activities supervising should ideally have 2 non-related adults. Where this is not possible, there should be a Rover who monitors multiple activities.
- d) 5 Year Rule – All volunteers should be a minimum of 5 years older than the oldest child in their group. Exceptions will be made in the event a youth volunteer is assisting an adult leader, i.e. Vacation Bible School.

2. Paid Staff:

- e) Minimum age required for employment is 18 years of age. If applicant will be working with high school youth, the minimum age becomes 23.
- f) Must undergo a satisfactory Criminal History Check
- g) Must have personal interview with Senior Pastor.
- h) Must undergo annual Safe Sanctuary training.

3. Church Activities – On-site:

- i) PPUMC has windows in all doors so that passersby may visually observe.
- j) Restroom Procedures – Parents please encourage your children to use the restroom prior to the start of any activities.
- k) Nursery Procedures: PPUMC follows minimum guidelines set by the State of Georgia for Staff/Children Ratios as follows:

<u>Ages of Children</u>	<u>Staff/Child Ratio</u>	<u>Max Group Size</u>
Infants under 18 mos (not yet walking)	1:6	12
Under 24 months (walking)	1:8	16
Two Year Olds	1:10	20
Three Year Olds	1:15	30
Four Year Olds	1:18	36
Five Year Olds	1:20	40
Six Year Olds	1:25	50

4. Church Activities – Offsite:

- a) All youth participants should have signed consent forms and medical forms.
- b) Youth must have access to a phone and/or cell phones during off-site trips. Leaders will designate appropriate times for calling during all off-site trips and will have the final decision regarding the use of or carrying of personal cell phones by the youth being supervised!
- c) Adult males will chaperone youth males / adult females will chaperone youth females.
- d) Sleeping arrangements – Adults and Youth will be segregated and adults can rotate on-call / monitoring time.
- e) Any exceptions should be reported immediately to the Church via the Sr. Pastor or Safe Sanctuaries Coordinator. (See Section - Exceptions)

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- f) PPUMC should have at least 2 “church-qualified” adult drivers on any off-site activity. “Church-qualified” Drivers are those who have been added in advance to the churches insurance and have acceptable driving records. (See Transportation Policy #9 – for additional details)
- 4. Playground Procedures:**
- a) Children will not be allowed on playground without adult supervision particularly during Wednesday night activities.
 - b) Playground should have 2 non-related adults supervising.
 - c) Playground will be closed during Church and Sunday School
- 5. Sunday School:**
- a) Children in 5th grade and below must be met by their parent or another designated adult and may not leave the Sunday School on their own.
 - b) Children 6th grade and above, may leave the Sunday School, upon dismissal, on their own.
- 6. Nursery:**
- a) PPUMC Volunteers and Staff are responsible for Nursery supervision even during non-PPUMC events such as weddings, Emmaus Gatherings, etc.
 - b) Standard Nursery procedures will apply to all such events.
- 7. Transportation Policy:**
- a) For events where PPUMC is providing transportation, **all youth must ride and return in church vans or buses!**
 - b) In the event a Senior Youth ignores the above and uses their own transportation, the parent of that youth and all other youths riding with that youth, will be contacted by the Youth Pastor or another adult leader. PPUMC staff and leaders are not responsible for the safe transportation of youth who violate the PPUMC Transportation Policy.
 - c) Best Practices also recommends a minimum of 2 vehicles, preferably church owned, for all trips out of Bulloch County. If personal vehicles are used, then youth may not travel in these unless accompanied by their parent.
- 8. Exceptions:**
- In the event an exception must be made to this policy, the group leader is required to immediately notify the Senior Pastor and/or the Safe Sanctuaries Coordinator. They will, in turn, make a written report to be kept on file documenting the following:
- a) What was the exception?
 - b) What course of action was deemed appropriate?
 - c) Statement from all adult volunteers present that the course taken was the best available option for the group.

9. PROCEDURE FOR REPORTING ALLEGED ABUSE

Priorities:

Pittman Park United Methodist Church must set priorities in dealing with the matter of a child abuse situation, sexual or otherwise. The right of the victim to remain private in their disclosure and know they will be received with love and care is paramount and should prevail against all other interests. The accused has a right to due process involving a fair, unbiased collection of facts by trained personnel in an atmosphere that does not render the process void of credibility. It should follow closely second to the first. Finally, it is understandable the church, whether it is PPUMC or UMC in general, has a responsibility to protect the good name of the organization in order to successfully continue in ministry. This priority should never be put above the first two. To do so would be unethical and arguably unholy. A proper reporting and handling procedure, open to the congregation and public will dispel any “bad press” the church could receive from public disclosure. Rarely is it the crisis that causes suspicion, but the response to the crisis.

Participants:

A central person should be designated as Safe Sanctuary Coordinator (**SSC**) should be the person to whom an accusation is made. That person should be an active church member who is not a member of the church staff, a chair of any committee, nor hold any leadership role in the church. However, it is highly recommended the central reporting person have a history of leadership roles in the church, but not currently serving in such a position. Such ensures the congregation is dealing with the report and not just the staff or insiders.

An adjunct committee should be formed consisting of the Senior Pastor, Associate Pastor, Youth Minister, Children’s Ministries Director and Staff-Parrish Committee Chair or Designee and Administrative Board Chair or Designee, Sunday School Superintendent and PPEC Superintendent. This committee, **the Safe Sanctuaries Adjunct Committee (SSAC)** should be the recipient of the accusation from the central reporting person if that person is actually the first to receive the report.

The church should be prepared to offer the services of an outside, independent counselor to the victim at the appropriate time, but *not* immediately following the report or during the initial reporting process.

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Process:

The church body should be educated on who the **SSC** is, the **SSC's** function, and how to contact them. That contact information should be readily available in a number of areas about the church facility. If that person is in fact the initial recipient of the information, they must receive and document the initial facts **without asking probing questions and without the offer of counseling**.

Once the victim has left the initial reporting process and without delay the **SSC** should then begin to contact a member of the **SSAC**. The member contacted, if not the Senior Pastor, should contact the Senior Pastor (or the Associate Pastor if the Senior Pastor is unavailable or the person being accused) and one other member. The other member should help to notify all other **SSAC** members of the report. If a committee member has taken the initial report, then the central reporting person will also be notified. A report shall not be considered to have been made to Pittman Park United Methodist Church until the central reporting person or a member of the adjunct committee has been notified of the accusation.

Simultaneously the Senior Pastor should contact law enforcement and then notify as many of the **SSAC** committee members as possible for that same date. Approximately fifteen minutes should have elapsed since the initial report recipient made a committee member aware of the accusation. Immediately following those notifications the senior pastor should contact the District Superintendent and report the accusation and the church's response. Multiple members are notified of the accusation so that it can not be perceived that one person may have the ability to deviate from the reporting procedure and cease, delay or otherwise manipulate the process.

In the event the allegation is made against a pastor or one of the adjunct committee members, then the senior committee member will be contacted and the senior most clergy, other than the accused, will be notified and take on the duty of the senior pastor as described above. **The accused will not be notified or otherwise allowed to discover the existence of the allegation.**

Once completed those steps should be reported to the central reporting person, regardless of whether or not they took the initial report. That report should be specific to who has been notified and particularly who, by name and position, in law enforcement has been notified.

When law enforcement responds, the **SSC** should deliver the details to the responding investigator **while available members of the committee are present**. A record of the meeting should be made documenting what was reported to the investigator and the investigator's instructions to the church.

At no time should any member of PPUMC or its staff notify the accused of the allegation or have any conversations with or in the presence of the accused from which the accused could render a suspicion of the allegation. The safety of the victim and the accused person's right to due process hang on that single, highly important detail.

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Follow-up:

At no time should a discussion arise concerning the credibility of the victim, the credibility of the accused or the credibility of the facts reported by the victim be tolerated. The church should take a neutral stance giving aid and counseling to the victim and following law enforcement's directions concerning the accused. **A SSAC member should be assigned to the alleged victim's family and maintain contact on a regular basis. The conference will handle counseling for the family.** The report should not even be acknowledged when curious inquiries are made until the investigation is complete. Complete means a decision to not prosecute has been made by the District Attorney and law enforcement has closed their case or an arrest has occurred. If an arrest is made, then those involved in the reporting process should only acknowledge the existence of the arrest and disclose no facts which they may possess concerning the allegation. The accused still maintains a right to due process and a fair trial which includes access to an unbiased jury pool. Should a conviction occur either by trial or plea, then those involved in the reporting process should direct all inquiries to the file of the reporting law enforcement agency pursuant to the Georgia Open Records Act.

Following a procedure such as this will ensure the safety and comfort of the victim which is crucial for disclosure to occur. The accused will enjoy fair handling in a neutral, unbiased light. The good name of the church remains intact and its civil liability will be minimal. But remember, at all costs, practice overrides policy. The best written policy will leave you liable in a civil court room if you do not practice it and **enforce** adherence to it.

Updated 20 September 2010

Gene Murkison	Chair Safe Sanctuaries Committee
Barrie Bloser	Chair Board of Trustees
Walter Gibson	Vice Chair of Staff Parish Committee
Franklin Beacham	Chair Administrative Board
Bryce Bunting	Lay Leadership
Daniel Doubleday	Youth Director
Tommy Sisson	Building Supervisor
Shelly Murphree	Children's Director