

**Conshohocken United Methodist Church
Safe Sanctuaries Policy**

I. Safe Sanctuaries Policy

In April 1996, The General Conference of The United Methodist Church adopted a resolution aimed at reducing the risk of sexual abuse of youth and children in the church. In 2004, the Annual Conference also adopted a resolution requiring each congregation to develop a Child Abuse Prevention Policy. These resolutions are grounded in scripture.

Jesus said, "Whoever welcomes a child...welcomes me" (Matthew 18:5). Children are our present and our future, our hope, our teachers, our inspiration. 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 most vulnerable among us.

God calls us to make our church a safe place, protecting our children and other vulnerable individuals from sexual, ritual and other forms of abuse. God calls us to create a community of faith where children and youth grow safe and strong.

Conshohocken United Methodist Church has decided to consider child safety and abuse in a single policy and establishes this Safe Sanctuaries policy to demonstrate our absolute and unwavering commitment to the physical safety, mental well-being and spiritual growth of all our children and youth.

Therefore, as a Christian community of faith and a United Methodist congregation, we pledge:

II. Recruitment and Screening of Volunteers and Staff

The following forms are included in Conshohocken United Methodist Church Recruitment, Screening and Selection process for volunteers and staff that work with children and youth:

State Police Criminal History Report

A report of criminal history information obtained from the Pennsylvania State Police

The report shall have been obtained with a one-year period preceding initial application. A new state Police Criminal History Report shall be obtained every three (3) years. The Pastor may request an updated report at any time within the three (3) year period.

The original document shall be kept in the file, or a copy shall be made of the original and be kept in the file with a notation that the original was shown by the applicant.

Childline Report

A certification obtained from the Department of Public Welfare as to whether the applicant is named in the central register as the perpetrator of a founded report of child abuse, with a founded case of child abuse, founded report for school employee or indicated report for school employee. The Pastor may request an updated report at any time within the three (3) year period.

FBI Clearance

A report of federal criminal history record information and fingerprints shall be obtained on all new applicants within the preceding one-year period from the Federal Bureau of Investigation. The Pastor may request an updated report at any time. The original document shall be kept in the file, or a copy shall be made of the original and be kept in the file with a notation that the original was shown by the applicant. FBI background checks for existing volunteers that are Safe Sanctuary Certified will be phased in over a three-year period.

Volunteer Application

A written application must be submitted by all volunteers.

Reference Checks

A minimum of two (2) Reference Checks shall be made on all new applicants for employment or volunteer service.

Covenant Statement

A covenant for the member to sign stating that in the event the member is recruited to work with children or youth, he or she agrees to follow the church's policies and procedures for the prevention of child abuse.

Volunteers and staff must complete and sign the Covenant Statement. All completed Covenant Statements and any accompanying records will be maintained by the Pastor in a locked file cabinet. Criminal background checks and reference checks should be done on all volunteers and staff every three years. Any criminal background check information that raises concerns will be handled by the Pastor. It is the intent of this policy that any actions will err on the side of protecting our children and youth. Pastor may request random background checks.

Prior to beginning work as a volunteer or staff with children or youth, each volunteer or staff member should complete Safe Sanctuary training as described in this policy. Completion of this training will be documented and records of this training will be kept by the Pastor.

Grounds for Denying Employment or Volunteer Service

- a. Grounds for denying employment or volunteer service shall not be limited to this list only.
- b. No applicant may be hired or used in volunteer service that is named in the central register as the perpetrator of a founded report of child abuse.
- c. No applicant may be hired or used in volunteer service if the applicant's criminal history record information indicates the applicant has been convicted of one or more offenses under Title 18 (related to crimes and offenses or an equivalent crime under Federal law or the law of another state).
- d. No applicant may be hired or used in volunteer service if the applicant's criminal history record information indicates the individual has been convicted of a felony offense under the Controlled Substance, Drug, Device and Cosmetic Act.

III. Procedures and Rules for Working with Children and Youth

The following procedures should be a part of the prevention strategy in this Safe Sanctuaries Policy:

1. The Two Adult Rule

No fewer than two adults shall be present with each group of children for any church sponsored program, event, or ministry. For the purpose of this rule, married couples working with the same group are considered one adult. If a second adult is not available during times of major use at the church, the classroom door should remain open and an adult may supervise the groups by "floating" in the area. Youth groups meeting at the church should have two adults present. Two adults, one of whom must be 21 years or older, are required on all trips and outings.

2. The 18-Age Limit Rule

Persons that work with children and youth must be at least eighteen years of age. At least one volunteer or paid worker in each nursery, preschool or children's area must be age eighteen or older. Teen helpers who are in senior high or older may substitute as one. No elementary children will be allowed in the nursery or preschool areas unless they are children of the volunteer or worker or under their direct supervision.

3. Five Year Older Rule

Any worker, youth or adult, volunteer or paid, that is not at least five years older than the group with which they are to work, must have two screened adults at least five years older who are supervising. Volunteers that work with senior high youth must be at least 20 years old.

This rule shall not prevent persons who do not meet this criterion from participating in events, trips and outings with younger persons.

4. Vehicle Rule

There shall be two adults at least eighteen years of age and with valid driver's licenses in vehicles transporting children or youth for any church-sponsored event, program or ministry. Drivers must be 25 years of age with a good driving history and shall submit their name, date of birth, and a copy of their license must be given to the Property Team.

When using contracted transportation that includes a hired driver, a minimum of two adults, 18 years or older must chaperone. All other vehicle requirements shall apply.

5. Six-Month Rule

In order to be eligible to work with children and youth, volunteers should have regularly attended Conshohocken United Methodist Church for six months. Regular attendance means attending worship or Sunday school no less than twice per month for six months. This rule shall not prevent parents from visiting and participating in activities of their children.

6. Advance Notice Rule

Children and Youth Ministry leaders shall always give the parents advance notice and full information regarding the event(s) in which their children will participate.

7. Parental Permissions

For off-site events, overnight events or those that require transportation, parents must give written permission for their child's participation. Permission forms should be maintained by the staff or volunteer person responsible for that ministry

8. State Reporting Rule

Any suspected cases of child abuse must be reported to the proper authorities. Conshohocken United Methodist Church will use the Report of Suspected Incident of Child Abuse form (Appendix H) to capture necessary information regarding allegations of abuse.

9. Photographing Children

Parents may give permission for their children to be photographed or videotaped when they fill out Registration forms. No identifying names shall be displayed on the church website. Parents are not required to give permission for their children to be photographed or videotaped in order to participate in programs.

10. Supervision of Children

No child shall be unsupervised.

IV. Implementation of the Safe Sanctuaries Policies and Procedures

The following procedures will be used as a part of the implementation strategy of this Safe Sanctuaries Policy:

1. There will be an annual orientation for hired and volunteer workers, staff and parents regarding the Safe Sanctuaries procedures. This orientation should occur at the beginning of each new school year. Parents of youth and children should receive a brief statement of the policy, including guidelines (including check-in procedures, information forms, discipline policy, and other parent handouts). This information should be a part of packets given to new Sunday School members. A videotape of the training may be used to train hired and volunteer workers who cannot participate in the annual orientation. All children and youth ministry workers (volunteer or paid) must read the Safe Sanctuaries Policy and sign the appropriate Participation Covenant. The Director of Christian Education shall be responsible for ensuring the annual orientation takes place.
2. Information about annual First Aid/CPR training for staff shall be given to all volunteers and hired workers. First aid kits should be available in the Resource Area and Children's Garden. Participation in First Aid and CPR classes shall be encouraged and may be offered as a program by the church to volunteers and congregation.
3. When an accident involving a child or youth occurs resulting in an injury or which has the potential for serious injury, the lead person should complete the Accident Report Form (Appendix E). An accident review should be done by the Christian Education Director as soon after the accident as possible. The review should focus on developing steps that would prevent a similar accident from reoccurring. The Accident Report Form and the minutes from the Accident Review meeting should be filed with the Pastor. Blank copies of the Accident Report forms will be kept in the offices of the Director of Christian Education.
4. Other serious incidents, excluding abuse (which shall be documented according to directions in Section V of this policy) should be documented on the Incident Report form (Appendix F). (Examples of such incidents might include fighting, stealing, alcohol or drug use.) Incident reports shall be maintained in a confidential file in the Pastor's office. Records of incidents shall be destroyed after a period of 18 months after an incident takes place. Blank copies of the Incident Report forms shall be kept in the same manner as Accident Report forms.
5. There should be windows on all classroom doors where children or youth are actively in class. Door windows should remain uncovered. If the door does not have a window, the door should remain open while the room is in use. In the event of counseling or one-on-one sessions with youth or children, an "open door" policy should be maintained. Another staff or volunteer should remain in the vicinity even if they are not within actual listening distance.
6. At no point in time should a single youth or child be in a staff member or volunteer's home without an adult non-family member present regardless of the nature of the church-sponsored event, program or ministry. This is not intended to prevent youth group meetings at a staff member or volunteer's home.

7. This Safe Sanctuaries policy, including reporting procedures and the plan of action in the event of an allegation and procedures and rules for implementation, should be reviewed annually by the Christian Education Team. Changes should be approved by the Administrative Council.

V. Responding to Allegations of Abuse

Every volunteer and paid worker with children and youth should be trained regarding Pennsylvania's requirements for reporting abuse to law enforcement authorities and child protection services. With any incident at the Church, the Pennsylvania authorities shall be notified at 1-800-932-1313. (See [Appendix G](#)). If an alleged incident of abuse involving church activities happens away from the church, then the incident must be reported in that jurisdiction. If occurrence is outside of PA the incident must be reported there.

(See [Appendix G](#)) Volunteers or staff members who suspect abuse of a child or youth in a non-church situation are also obligated to report the alleged incident to the appropriate authorities.

How an adult responds to a child when he or she tries to disclose abuse can influence the outcome of the child's victimization. By maintaining an apparent calm, the adult can help assure the child that everything is going to be okay. By not criticizing the child, any statements the abuser made to the victim about the child getting into trouble can be counteracted. The adult should reassure the child of concern about what happened and tell the child that help will be sought. Allegations must be reported to the proper authorities, and the child or youth should be told that the proper authorities will be advised but no one else will be told. ***It is very important that no one except child protective services (and if applicable one of the persons listed below) be told about allegations of abuse – if the allegations cannot be substantiated, one can be sued for defamation of character.***

When reporting to law enforcement authorities, one is not required to know for certain that a child has been abused, only to have a reasonable cause to suspect and make the report in "good faith". When these requirements are met, all states provide immunity from civil and criminal liability for reporting child abuse. However, it is important to understand that no immunity is afforded for reporting or mentioning the suspicion or allegation to other persons.

Allegations by a child concerning abuse in a church-related activity must be reported to one of the individuals listed below. This should occur immediately, the Pastor or Christian Education Director would notify Conference and Police.

- Pastor
- Director of Christian Education

This committee will not wait for a time when everyone can be present, but will initiate its meeting as soon after the alleged incident as possible, but no more than 24 hours after the initial report. Proceedings shall be conducted confidentially in a way that protects the rights of the alleged victim, the family and the accused, including their privacy. Legal immunity only exists for initial reporting directly to a child abuse hotline, law enforcement or child protective services.

The committee will first assure the alleged abuser has been removed from contact with the alleged child or youth victim. The committee will next assure that all reporting requirements have been met. The Report of Suspected Incident of Child Abuse (See [Appendix](#)) shall be used to record action taken. *It is imperative that the person filling out this report be familiar with Pennsylvania law, as well as legal liability for defamation of character and invasion of privacy,*

before taking any action or completing the report. The committee will take action to gather all necessary information regarding the incident, while taking all necessary precautions not to interfere with any official investigation.

The Pastor or his /her designee will contact the District Superintendent. . The District Superintendent or his/her designee will be the spokesperson who will be responsible for dealing with the media and reporting to Conference. If the alleged abuser is a pastor, the Eastern PA Conference Reporting Procedure shall be followed. (See Appendix I) With guidance from a legal professional, the Pastor shall initiate appropriate ministries and actions over a long period to enable healing by all affected persons. Our goal is to always strive to protect the rights of the victim and the accused.

[Appendix A](#) – PA State Police Background Check & Childline

[Appendix B](#) – FBI Clearance

[Appendix C](#) - Volunteer Form and References

[Appendix D](#) - Covenant Statement

[Appendix E](#) - Accident Reporting Form

[Appendix F](#) - Incident Reporting Form

[Appendix G](#) - Reporting Child Abuse

[Appendix H](#) - Report of Suspected Incident of Child Abuse

[Appendix I](#) - Types and Indicators of Child Abuse

[Appendix J](#) - Application Form for Drivers

[Appendix K](#) - [Child/Youth Program Permission Form](#)

[How Do I Get Started with Safe Sanctuary Certification?](#)