

Bethel United Methodist Church **Child* Protection Policy**

*For the purposes of this document, unless otherwise stated, the term "child" refers to ages 18 and under.

I. Purpose

Jesus plainly taught that children were to be included and provided for within the community of faith. Throughout the history of the Christian church, children have been included in the worship and ministry of the community of faith. Today, the church may be the only place where some children find unconditional love and care they so desperately need to grow, to thrive, and to become faithful people. As Christians, we must take our responsibilities to our children very seriously, always attending to their spiritual growth and nurturing.

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. Child abuse prevention and risk reduction policies and procedures are essential for every congregation, not only for the protection of our children but also for our volunteers and our employed workers with children. As faithful adults, we must do all that we can to create a safe and secure environment for the children in our care. This includes the physical, emotional and spiritual dangers that may confront them. We acknowledge that religious organizations are not immune to incidents of abuse and misconduct; however, we are committed to the protection of all children and other persons participating in the activities and programs at BUMC. Abuse, exploitation, or harassment in any form, physical, emotional, or sexual, will not be tolerated. As part of our congregation's baptismal vows, we covenant with each other to take responsibility for the nurture of faith. As such, the members of this church have pledged to uphold one another. In the spirit of Christ, we teach, strengthen, and support the individual's relationship with the church family. As our baptismal vows imply, we also undertake to preserve the integrity of each person within our church family. BUMC is committed to the safety and sanctity of all children. A well-implemented child protection policy not only protects children, but also the adults who serve and minister to children.

This Child Protection Policy covers any person employed by or volunteering at BUMC in any capacity involving children and all outside organizations using BUMC facilities for child programs.

Therefore, we embrace this policy that puts in place the practices and procedures necessary to keep children free from harm. We also see these practices and procedures as a protection for the adults who have graciously stepped forward to care for the children within our congregation and community. Finally, we endorse all aspects of this policy, realizing that by protecting children, and reducing the possibility of abuse, we are also taking critical steps necessary to protect the entire ministry of our church.

II. Requirements

In order to provide a safe community for children and adults, the church requires all employees and volunteers working with children to comply with the "**Requirements of Employees and Volunteers**" and the "**Child Protection Guidelines and Procedures**" that make up this Child Protection Policy adopted by the Staff Parish Relations Committee and Church Council of the Bethel United Methodist Church. With regard to the Child Protection Policy, all employees will be under the supervision of the Work Area on Education, as well as the Pastor and Staff Parish Relations Committee of BUMC. All Qualifying volunteers will be under the supervision of the respective program staff persons and appropriate ministry areas.

*Volunteers in place as of October 1, 2008, will not have to complete the written application; however, they are required to comply with all other requirements. Volunteers new after October 1, 2008, will be required to complete an application.

III. Review

The Work Area on Education shall receive reports annually from program staff persons and respective ministries as to the effectiveness of this Child Protection Policy, shall suggest changes and improvements, and shall report at least annually, or as otherwise required to Church Council on the status of the policy.

IV. Requirements for Employees and Volunteers:

A. Employees

- All employees must complete and sign an application, which includes references and permission to do a background check.
- All employees will be interviewed by an appropriate staff member and the SPRC.
- All employees must successfully complete and maintain training and certification in CPR and First Aid.
- Reference checks will be conducted on all applicants and employees.
- Criminal background checks will be completed on each applicant and all employees through the South Carolina Conference, UMC or other agency deemed appropriate by the Pastor and SPRC. (NOTE: Background checks will be conducted by a designated church member; results of background checks will only be shared with those making the decision on whether to place the applicant in a ministry position. Offenses that would keep an applicant from being hired or selected would include, but may not be limited to, all convictions of crimes of violence, abuse or felonies against people, especially children.)
- Employees must read the Child Protection Policy of this church, agree to it by completing and signing the appropriate forms and submitting to background check and training requirements.
- All employees must attend at least one (1) orientation/training session about BUMC's Child Protection Policy every three years. Training events shall take place on promotion Sunday and/or any other times deemed necessary with attempts to ensure that scheduling of training is done at times that maximize participation.
- All employees must successfully complete an annual in service training in preventing and responding to childhood sexual abuse.
- For purposes of the Child Protection Policy, an adult chaperone shall be defined as a person who is at least eighteen years old and is two years older than the oldest participant.

B. Volunteers:

- All volunteers beginning a service on or after October 1, 2008, must complete and sign an application and grant permission to do a background check. After the initial application, new volunteers and those volunteers exempt from the application will fill out a Volunteer Short Form to update information as needed or when changes in information occur.
- All volunteers in place before October 1, 2008, must sign and submit an authorization form for a background check by October 1, 2008.
- All volunteers in a supervisory capacity must successfully complete and maintain training and certification in CPR and First Aid.

- A criminal background check will be completed on each volunteer, through the South Carolina Conference, UMC or other agency deemed appropriate by the Pastor and PPRC. (NOTE: Background checks will be conducted by a designated church member; results of background checks will only be shared with the Pastor and the PPRC on an as needed basis. Results shall be kept in the Pastor's office in a secure location for which only the pastor has access. Offenses that would keep an applicant from being hired or selected would include, but may not be limited to, all convictions of crimes of violence, abuse or felonies against people, especially children.)
- All volunteers must attend at least one (1) training session about BUMC's Child Protection Policy every three years. Training events shall take place on promotion Sunday and/or any other times deemed necessary with attempts to ensure that scheduling of training is done at times that maximize participation.
- All volunteers must sign and affirm that they have read and understand all policies, including this Child Protection Policy, prior to participating as a volunteer.
- During the first 3 months of service, a new volunteer must serve in conjunction with an established volunteer in Children's Ministries and/or Youth Ministries.

V. Child Protection Guidelines and Procedures:

A. General Guidelines and Procedures for All Activities Involving Children

- No adult volunteer or employee should be alone with one participant. An exception to this policy would be in a situation in which the contact occurs in a public place or in an area where others are able to clearly witness the interaction by being in and out of the area where the employee or volunteer is working with the participant. If a situation unexpectedly does not meet these criteria of the policy, then the adult volunteer or employee shall submit a self-incident report to the Pastor who shall provide a copy of said report to the Chairman PPRC.
- The supervising employee and a volunteer shall remain at the BUMC until all participants have left the premises or have been picked-up by his or her parent or guardian.
- The supervising employee and/or other volunteer should be informed of the destination of any participant leaving the immediate area where a group which falls under this policy is having a program. The supervising and/or other chaperone should also be aware of the time of exiting by the participants and the time returning to the classroom by all participants. Each participant should choose a same sex buddy to accompany them to the restroom or any errand in the building. The supervising employee and/or other adult chaperone should know the destination of any participant leaving the group and be aware of the time exiting and returning to the classroom.
- Adults should not be alone with children in the restroom; trips to the restroom should be with at least two children. Where practical, the adult should stay in the doorway and not in direct, physical contact with the child. Preschool age children should be accompanied to the restroom by an adult who should wait at the door.
- Any participant appearing to be under the influence of any alcohol, drugs or other mind altering substances, shall not be permitted to participate in the scheduled activity and the supervising employee and/or other chaperone shall contact said participant's parent or guardian to pick up the participant from the scheduled activity.
- Rooms normally occupied by the children should have a door with a window. If the door is to be shut, the window cannot be completely covered.
- During programming when classrooms are in use, there should be a Hall Monitor present. The hall monitor shall be a designated volunteer and/or paid staff member.

- Employees and volunteers should address behavior that is disruptive with positive verbal instruction defining behavioral expectations and/or time-outs. Physical discipline and abusive verbal correction is prohibited.
- Employees and volunteers should never allow themselves to be involved in a situation that could give rise to the perception of appearance of inappropriate behavior.
- In accordance with this policy section "Reporting and Responding," employees and volunteers should report immediately any suspicious or inappropriate behavior that suggests (1) sexual abuse, misconduct, or exploitation, (2) neglect, (3) physical abuse, or (4) emotional abuse.

B. Policy for Scheduled Events Held at BUMC (excluding lock-ins) Which Are Not Held During Regular Church Hours

- There should be a minimum of two unrelated adult chaperones in attendance at all events held at Bethel United Methodist Church which are not held during regular church hours. If there are more than two adult chaperones, then there can be a relationship between the chaperones as long as all are not related.

C. Off-Campus Activities and Lock-ins

- There shall be a minimum of two unrelated adult chaperones present on all off-campus activities and/or lock-ins. The ratio of chaperones to children shall be a minimum of one chaperone per ten (10) children or any fraction thereof. If there are more than two adult chaperones, then there can be a relationship between the chaperones as long as all are not related.
- There shall be a minimum of two adult chaperones on the bus at any time said bus is being used by any children's Program.
- Only if age appropriate should a child be allowed to leave the immediate area where the children's group is having a program. If appropriate, at any time when participants are off-campus and a participant(s) need(s) to leave the group (i.e., for concessions and/or to go to the restroom), said participant(s) must choose a same sex buddy to accompany them at any time which a participant leaves the group. If more than two participants leave the group, then there shall be at least two of each sex in the subgroup.
- For off-site activities, as each facility will be different, it will be the responsibility of the program director/staff member in charge to determine how best to use the facility in compliance with this policy.
- All adult volunteers and staff members who drive and/or chaperone on off-site trips involving children should be in conformance with all aspects of the Child Protection Policy. All adults who drive children should provide a copy of a valid SC driver's license and an insurance card to the responsible staff person.
- For overnight trips and lock-ins.
 - Males and females must be segregated during sleeping time. With the exception of the requirement which follows, the chaperones shall determine at what time males and females are to go into their separate sleeping areas. However, after 2:00 a.m., males and females shall be segregated into separate sleeping areas.
 - If both male and female participants are attending the overnight trip and/or lock-in, then there shall be chaperones of each gender present.
 - For lock-ins taking place within BUMC there shall be designated meeting areas and the participants shall not be allowed to leave the designated meeting area without permission/supervision.

- o Once one (1) hour has elapsed after the starting time of the lock-in, then no participant shall be allowed to enter the premises. For instance, if a lock-in is scheduled to begin at 9:00 p.m., then no other participants shall be allowed to enter after 10:00 p.m.
- o Games and activities during lock-ins shall be age appropriate and shall not be of the nature in which a participant would feel threatened or intimidated during participation in the event. For instance, there shall be no playing hide and seek in the dark.
- If it is deemed appropriate (depending on ages of children and lodging circumstances) for adults to share accommodations with children, the adults shall be the same sex as the children being chaperoned present in the rooms. It is recommended that there be at least one adult per room and in no event shall there be less than one adult per ten (10) children or fraction thereof.

D. Guidelines and Procedures for Non-Church Sponsored Use of the Church Facility:

- Any non-member/outside group or member (i.e., Boy Scouts, Alcoholics Anonymous) who is using the facilities for non-church related functions will receive and be required to sign for a copy of this Child Protection Policy.
- At the time a contract is made with an outside or non-church group or person or with a member (who is using the facilities for a non-church related function) to use the facility and a key is picked up, it will be the duty of the Church Administrator to distribute a copy of our policy to the outside party and to obtain a dated signature (within 30 days prior to use) from the responsible party.

E. Guidelines for Staff in Charge of Personnel/Volunteers:

- It is the responsibility of the appropriate staff member to give each newly hired employee and each new volunteer a copy of and orientation of the Child Protection Policy.
- The appropriate staff member will keep accurate and up to date records of training, background checks, and certification according to this policy on each of his/her employees and volunteers.
- Pastors along with other program staff, Work Area on Education will review the implementation of the Child Protection Policy and report their findings to Church Council annually.

VI. Reporting and Responding to Reports of Suspicious or Inappropriate Activity:

**In all cases, issues of Reporting and Responding must be handled with CONFIDENTIALITY.*

A. Definitions of Child Abuse and Neglect:

According to the National Clearinghouse on Child Abuse and Neglect Information,

Neglect is failure to provide for a child's basic needs. Neglect may be:

- Physical (e.g. failure to provide necessary food or shelter, or lack of appropriate supervision)
- Medical (e.g. failure to provide necessary medical or mental health treatment)
- Educational (e.g. failure to educate a child or attend to special education needs)
- Emotional (e.g. inattention to a child's emotional needs, failure to provide psychological care, or permitting the child to use alcohol or drugs)

These situations do not always mean a child is neglected. Sometimes cultural values, the standards of care in the community, and poverty may be contributing factors, indicating the family is in need of information and assistance. When a family fails to use information and resources, and the child's safety is at risk, then child welfare intervention may be required.

Physical Abuse is a physical injury (ranging from minor bruises to severe fractures or death) as a result of punching, beating, kicking, biting, shaking, throwing, stabbing, choking, hitting (with a hand, stick, strap or other object), burning or otherwise harming a child. Such injury is considered abuse regardless of whether or not the caretaker intended to hurt the child.

Sexual Abuse includes, but is not limited to, activities by an adult or child or youth such as fondling a child's genitals, penetration, incest, rape, sodomy, indecent exposure, and exploitation through prostitution or the production of pornographic materials. Sexual abuse may also include inappropriate sexual conversations between the same parties.

Emotional Abuse is a pattern of behavior that impairs a child's emotional development or sense of self-worth. This may include constant criticism, threats, or rejection, as well as withholding love, support, or guidance. Emotional abuse is often difficult to prove and therefore, Child Protective Services may not be able to intervene without evidence of harm to the child. Emotional abuse is almost always present when the others are identified.

***All abuse or suspected abuse should be reported to the staff person in charge (see below under "Reporting".) Reporter can be kept confidential.**

B. Reporting of suspicious or inappropriate activity:

- In every case the safety of the child or youth should be immediately ensured.
- Suspicious or inappropriate activity brought to the attention of an employee or volunteer must be reported immediately to a member of the SPRC and the pastor.
- South Carolina law requires that certain members of the BUMC staff be mandatory reporters, including the pastors, ECC staff and teachers and other church staff. These individuals are required by law to report any known or reasonably suspected reports of child abuse to a local law enforcement agency or Department of Social Services. However, all other adults who serve in ministry with youth and children are strongly encouraged to report abuse if they suspect that it has occurred. BUMC considers the reporting of suspected abuse a moral and ethical obligation.
- All allegations shall be regarded as serious and will be responded to in a professional manner; due consideration shall be given the rights and privacy of both alleged victim and the person being accused.
- Appropriate persons to whom to make this report would be:
 - a. Pastor
 - b. a member of the Staff Parish Relations Committee
- Any employee or volunteer accused of abuse will be removed immediately from contact with children in our church until an investigation by authorities is concluded. The results of the investigation will determine if the person is reinstated or released.
- The person receiving the report of the alleged abuse or suspicious activity shall then document the date, time and circumstances of the alleged incident on an Incident Report Form.
- The appropriate staff member will:
 - a. Notify the child's parent(s) or guardian(s) as appropriate;
 - b. Completely document the report and complete an incident Report Form, maintain and safely secure and store all documentation of the incident and report;
 - c. Contact the appropriate authorities;
 - d. Notify the church's legal counsel and insurance carrier;
 - e. Determine with legal counsel the appropriate communication necessary to church and media;
 - f. Maintain confidentiality; and
 - g. Comply with all state laws and refrain from further investigation of the incident to avoid compromising, interfering with or delaying a legal investigation.

VII. Policy Violations:

- Any employee or volunteer with children and youth that does not follow these policies will be contacted about their behavior and may be terminated from their position immediately.
- In the event that a violation of the policy as set forth above occurs, then the adult volunteer or employee who has been involved in said violation shall submit a self-incident report to the Pastor who shall provide a copy of said report to the Chairman SPRC