

October 2019 updates

**Child Youth and Vulnerable Adult Protection Policy**  
*Cokesbury United Methodist Church*  
**Pensacola, FL**

The General Conference of The United Methodist Church, in April 1996, adopted a resolution aimed at eliminating any potential for 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 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 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." (para. 162C)

Tragically, churches have not always been safe places for children. Child sexual abuse and exploitation occur in churches, large and small, urban and rural. The problem cuts across all economic and cultural lines. It is real, and virtually every congregation has among its members, adult survivors of early sexual trauma.

Such incidents are devastating to all who are involved. God calls us to make our churches safe places, protecting children and other vulnerable persons from sexual and physical 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*. P. 384-386).

**Thus, in covenant with all United Methodist congregations, Cokesbury United Methodist Church adopts this policy for the prevention of abuse in our church.**

**Purpose**

Our purpose for establishing this Child, Youth and Vulnerable Adult Abuse Prevention Policy and accompanying procedures is to demonstrate our total and unwavering commitment to the physical, emotional and spiritual safety of all our children, youth and vulnerable adults.

**Covenant Statement**

Cokesbury United Methodist Church hereby pledges to conduct the ministry of Jesus Christ in ways that assure the physical and emotional safety and spiritual growth of all of our children, youth and vulnerable adults as well as all of our volunteers/workers with children, youth and vulnerable adults. We will follow reasonable safety measures when selecting and recruiting workers; we will implement appropriate operational procedures in all areas of programming and care; we will train our workers with children, youth, and vulnerable adults on our procedures and policies; and we will have a clearly defined procedure for reporting a suspected incident of abuse consistent with state law.

**Theological Reflection**

We adopt this policy in accordance with the statement we as a congregation make at each Baptism; that we will "nurture children and youth in the Christian faith and life and include them in our care." With this policy, we renew our Baptismal pledge to "live according to the example of Christ" and surround children and youth with a "community of love and forgiveness, that they may grow in their trust of God, and be thus confirmed and strengthened in the way that leads to life eternal." (Baptismal Covenant II, *United Methodist Book of Worship*, p.96).

**We will adhere to the Safe Sanctuaries Policy and Minimum Standards, as adopted by the 2016 Alabama-West Florida Annual Conference, and found below:**

In covenant with all United Methodist congregations and the Alabama-West Florida Annual Conference of the United Methodist Church, we endeavor as follows:

- A. We shall strive to provide for physical safety and spiritual growth of all our children, youth, and at-risk or vulnerable adults.
- B. We shall strive to demonstrate the love of Jesus Christ so that each person 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, *The United Methodist Hymnal*, p. 44).
- C. We shall strive to prevent physical, emotional, or sexual abuse of children, youth, and at-risk or vulnerable adults involved in any ministry sponsored by our Annual Conference or our local congregation.
- D. We shall strive to provide and facilitate the use of reasonable care and effort in caring for the children, youth, and at-risk or vulnerable adults involved in any ministry sponsored by our Annual Conference or our local congregation.
- E. We shall strive to minister to and act in the best interests of persons who are experiencing abuse or who have been victims of abuse in the past.
- F. We shall strive to be aware of and comply with our legal responsibilities regarding the types of abuse addressed in this document.
- G. We shall strive to screen all current and future staff, and all volunteers for every program that involves children, youth, and at-risk or vulnerable adults.
- H. We shall strive to acknowledge, respond to, and investigate all questions or reports regarding alleged abuse.
- I. We shall strive to adhere to biblical church discipline, particularly as recognized in ¶ 2702 of *The Book of Discipline of The United Methodist Church 2012*, which names child abuse, sexual abuse, sexual misconduct, and sexual harassment as chargeable offenses for clergy and lay members.
- J. We shall commit to observe the Safe Sanctuaries Policy and Minimum Standards.

**Cokesbury United Methodist Church will abide by the following, in addition to the Conference Safe Sanctuaries Policy:**

#### **I. STAFF AND VOLUNTEER RECRUITMENT AND SELECTION GUIDELINES**

##### **A. Six Month Rule**

Cokesbury United Methodist Church will not use anyone as a volunteer for children, youth or vulnerable adult in the church unless they have been a member of the church for at least six (6) months. This time of interaction between ministry leaders and the applicant allows leaders to better evaluate the suitability of an applicant for youth work. In some situations, this rule is not feasible and may be waived on basis of probation. If the six-month rule is

waived, program leaders may take additional steps to screen the applicant at their own discretion.

### **B. Application**

Applicants must complete and sign an application and the related waivers giving permission to check references and background information.

### **C. Reference Checks**

Designated Church Leaders will check three (3) work references for each primary worker, using the standard Reference Form provided. References may include former teachers, or others in similar positions. The use of family members or personal friends as references is prohibited. The references will be done by phone, mail, or in person. For applicants for compensated positions, additional former supervisors may be checked.

### **D. Background Checks**

All clergy and paid staff must successfully pass a Level 1 background check to the extent permitted by law, prior to employment to determine current or prior child abuse, sexual misconduct, criminal record, violent behavior, or pedophilic behavior. All volunteers who are responsible for or interact with children, youth, or vulnerable adults (i.e. teachers, leaders, chaperons, drivers, presenters, etc.) must successfully pass a Level 1 background check prior to volunteering or working with children, youth, or vulnerable adults to determine current or prior child abuse, sexual misconduct, criminal record, violent behavior, or pedophilic behavior. Further, to the extent required by the Florida Department of Children and Families or other governmental authority, all clergy, staff, and volunteers must successfully pass a Level I background check prior to working or volunteering with children, youth, or vulnerable adults. A background check will be valid for two years unless the individual has been absent for twelve (12) months or longer.

### **E. Prior Convictions**

Individuals who have been convicted of physical or sexual abuse or neglect may not work in any church-sponsored activity or program for preschoolers, children, youth or vulnerable adults.

### **F. Interview**

All applicants must be interviewed for suitability for the work they desire to do. Interviews will be conducted by the leader of the program in which the applicant will work/volunteer, or by other persons designated by the program leader. A team of interviewers may be used. Church policy and guidelines should be discussed during the interview. A standard interview form will be used to insure consistency.

### **G. Confidentiality of Information**

The church will keep confidential all information received in the applicant selection process. Selection information will be marked as such and stored in a locked location with limited access afforded only to church staff and others with a need to know. The Safe Sanctuaries Committee holds responsibility for the implementation of these policies. The Lead Pastor, Executive Pastor, Human Resources Staff Representative, Children and/or Youth Director and the Facilities Administrator all hold responsibility for the maintenance of confidential records.

**II. STAFF/VOLUNTEER SUPERVISION GUIDELINES**

All meetings of children and/or youth affiliated with Cokesbury United Methodist Church will be governed by the following guidelines:

**A. Two adult rule**

Two approved and unrelated adults must be present at all times. This applies to classroom activities, activities away from the church facility and when transporting children and youth. Whenever possible, teachers will be assigned in teams of two or more per Sunday School hour to every class of children or youth. Concerted effort will be made to recruit sufficient numbers of volunteer teachers/leaders to permit such team teaching. Other church sponsored or community groups of children or youth who meet at the church should have two or more unrelated leaders present whenever possible. When feasible, both male and female leaders would be present. If the group stays overnight at the church, or if a church sponsored group leaves the premises, two or more unrelated leaders must be present and must include at least one male and female if the group is mixed gender. See additional specifications for youth overnight outings in section II-G of this document.

**Goals For Worker to Child Ratios** – Cokesbury United Methodist Church has a goal of maintaining the following ratios of ministry workers to children whenever feasible. These ratios are goals. The church recognizes that in some circumstances achieving these ratios may not be feasible, such as an unexpected number of children showing up for an event.

Program	Workers	Children/Youth
Nursery	2	10
Sunday School	2	14
Youth Programs	2	16
Mid-week Classes	2	14
VBS	2	14

**B. Nursery Checkout Procedure**

All parents utilizing the church nursery will abide by the check-in/check-out procedures.

**C. Open Door Policy**

Further protection for the children requires that an open door policy be followed. This policy states that the parents of the children served, the clergy, administrative and professional staff of the church have the right to visit and observe the children's/youth activity, classroom, or church-sponsored program at any time, unannounced.

**D. Outside Access**

There must be access to a phone, cell phone or pager when groups are at or away from the church facility. The church office or authorized church representative will be given this number prior to the groups' departure from church property.

**E. Doors and Windows**

All classroom and office doors will have a window or visibility from hallway or remain open while occupied. Windows will be kept free from adornment and kept locked at all times.

#### **F. Individual Counseling**

One-on-one interactions are sometimes necessary and appropriate but care must be taken that they be conducted in an environment that provides visibility by other adults. If at all possible, another adult is to have knowledge of staff members' whereabouts and with whom they are meeting. Children and youth receiving individual counseling should be told they are free to discuss any aspects of the counseling process with a parent or other adult, especially if they are uncomfortable about anything that occurs in counseling. All incidents of suspected abuse and neglect revealed during the session will be reported in accordance with section III of this policy.

#### **G. Outings Away From Church Property**

All children and youth participating in out-of-town and over-night outings must have written consent and a notarized medical release form. (Medical release and consent forms may be completed for a two-year period and must be renewed annually). There must be access to a phone, cell phone or pager when groups are away from the church property. If the outing involves water activities such as swimming, a certified lifeguard will accompany the group. In no circumstance is one adult (other than the parent) to take a child or children on an overnight outing alone. Female staff will supervise female youth in their sleeping quarters and male staff will supervise male youth. With the exception of a parent/child combination, a staff and youth will not occupy the same bed or sleeping bag.

#### **H. Training**

CUMC volunteer and paid staff will be given the opportunity to attend training about Safe Sanctuaries policies, procedures and child abuse issues on an annual basis. Annual opportunities to receive CPR Training will also be offered to staff and volunteers.

#### **I. Verification of Reading of Policy Statement**

Upon receipt of this policy statement, the volunteer or paid staff person will read and sign a statement that he/she has read Cokesbury United Methodist Church's Child and Vulnerable Adult Abuse Protection Policy (which includes the Conference Policy information).

### **III. RESPONSE BY CHURCH WORKERS TO ALLEGATIONS OF ABUSE**

As caring Christians, we are committed to protect and advocate for children/youth and vulnerable adults participating in the life of the church. The church is entrusted to provide an emotionally safe, spiritually grounded, healthy environment for children, youth, and vulnerable adults in which they are protected from abuse. It is our legal and moral responsibility to report suspected abuse whenever it comes to our attention, regardless of where that abuse takes place. We shall report suspected abuse to stop potentially existing abuse and to prevent further abuse. To report abuse is to witness to the world of the love and justice of God. Reporting abuse is a form of ministering to the needs of those crying out for help. If abuse occurs, it is our intention to act as an advocate for all affected persons, providing support, information, assistance and intervention. We seek to provide a supportive atmosphere, offering both objectivity and empathy as we seek to create a climate in which healing can take place. If abuse is suspected by, observed by or disclosed to a volunteer and/or paid staff member of the church,

that person shall report the incident immediately to the pastor or designee. (If the accused is the pastor, see information below.) Be prepared to do the following:

- A. Ensure the protection of and tend to the immediate needs of the victim, as the situation requires.
- B. IMMEDIATELY contact the senior pastor or pastor on call.
- C. IMMEDIATELY notify the proper authorities (immediate supervisor, designated church child protection representative or the adult in charge of the event.) This person will:
  1. Provide written documentation concerning the incident on the designated form.
  2. Notify the Department of Children and Families. This is a requirement of the law.
  3. Notify the pastor in charge. If the pastor is the accused party, the designee will notify the chair of the Staff Parish Relations Committee and the District Superintendent.
  4. Give written documentation to the pastor and/or Chair of the Staff Parish Committee.
- D. The pastor or designee will notify the parents/family/guardians of the victim and take whatever steps are necessary to assure the safety of the child/youth/vulnerable adult until the parent(s)/family/guardians arrive. It is important to emphasize that the proper authorities must be notified even if the parents/family/guardians do not wish the incident to be reported. (Note: If one or both of the parents/family/guardians is the alleged abuser, contact the proper authorities listed above. Follow their advice about notification of the parents/family/guardians.)
- E. After having reported the suspected abuse to the proper authorities, the incident is to be reported immediately to the church's attorney, the church's insurance company, and the District Superintendent. The District Superintendent will report the allegation to the Bishop's Office. Do not try to handle this without professional assistance. If the accused is a clergy (Deacon or Elder) member of an Annual Conference, or local pastor, provisions of *The 2016 Book of Discipline of The United Methodist Church* must be followed. A list of emergency numbers will be available to staff/volunteers at all times.
- F. All appointed clergy background checks are on file with the Pensacola District Office and subject to review by the Staff Parish Relations Committee (SPRC). Any appointed clergy information related to a background check is disclosed to SPRC via District Office, the Board of Ordained Ministry and /or the Alabama West Florida Annual Conference. All Paid or contract staff and volunteers are required to immediately disclose any allegation of physical, mental, or sexual abuse made after Background Checks referenced in Section 1D are completed. Failure to do so may result in discipline up to and including termination.
- G. If the accused is working in a volunteer or paid position with children, youth or vulnerable adults in the church, immediately, yet with dignity and respect for the sacred worth of the

person, remove the accused from further involvement with children/youth and/or vulnerable adults.

- H. Once the proper authorities have been contacted and the safety of the child/youth and/or vulnerable adult is secured, the pastor or other designated person may tell the accused that a report has been made. If the accused is a volunteer or paid staff of the church, that person shall be relieved temporarily of his or her duties until the investigation is finished. If the accused is a paid staff person of the church, arrangements should be made to either maintain or suspend his or her income until the allegations are cleared or substantiated.
- I. Any contact with the media should be handled by a pre-determined spokesperson. Care will be taken to safeguard the privacy and confidentiality of all involved. The spokesperson should generally convey that the matter is under investigation and any comments made prior to the conclusion of the investigation would be premature.
- J. A written report of the basic information shall be kept to ensure on-going ministry to, and advocacy for, victims and others involved. A form for this purpose shall be available in the church office. The report shall be brief and contain only factual information relevant to the situation. It shall be filed in a secure place in order to ensure confidentiality. It shall be written in ink or typed to prevent it from being changed. The church must also file a copy of the report with the Bishop's Office of the Annual Conference where it shall remain confidential.

**Safe Sanctuaries Policy and Minimum Standards**  
(adopted at the 2016 Annual Conference Session)  
Digital/On-Line Ministry Addendum

**Digital/On-Line Ministry** includes, but is not limited to, video conferencing, teleconferencing, chat rooms, private/group messaging, web sites, and all social media platforms.

DIGITAL/ON-LINE MINISTRY guidelines include:

1. Church “Admin” on Ministry Accounts. There shall always be two, unrelated authority figures with administrator rights on any account that is posting official ministry content.

2. Church-Sponsored programs/events/broadcasts.

a. Where there is no real-time interaction between viewers (e.g., a video posted but not broadcast live) the two adult rule applies in that there shall always be two, unrelated authority figures with administrator rights on any account that is posting official ministry content.

b. Where there is real-time interaction between viewers, there shall be two, unrelated authority figures in attendance wherever the real-time interaction is happening (chat room, etc.).

c. The church programs/events/broadcasts shall be initiated from official church accounts rather than personal accounts. Two authority figures shall be included.

3. Friending/Online Social Connections.

a. Digital/on-line media accounts shall be set up as ministry accounts and shall have two authority figures as administrators.

b. Ministry leaders involved with children, youth, or at-risk or vulnerable adults shall never initiate a “friend request” on personal accounts. Parents of children, youth, or at-risk or vulnerable adults may request to be a friend on a personal account of a ministry leader.



c. The connections and all shared information on these sites shall only be ministry related and that information includes but is not limited to: GIFs, videos, and photographs.

#### 4. Video Conferencing.

a. There shall always be two unrelated authority figures present in any video conference.

b. When possible, a waiting room shall be employed for participants to ensure that two authority figures are present before students enter the video conference.

c. When breakout rooms are employed one authority figure shall function as a floater (refer to II. B. 5) when it is possible to “float” between rooms.

d. When an authority figure is available in the house of a participating student, their presence in the room with the student can count toward the two-adult rule.

#### 5. Private Text Messaging.

a. Private text messaging is allowed. When possible, it shall be shifted to a group text that shall include two authority figures.

b. No messaging shall take place on a platform where messages automatically disappear.

c. Authority figures shall not delete history or chat logs from a messaging platform for 30 days.

#### 6. One on One Video Calls.

a. One on one video calls shall not take place.

b. When a child, youth, or at-risk or vulnerable adult initiates a video call the authority figure is to deny the call and move the conversation to a group video platform, text, or audio call.

c. If and when video calls are unavoidable, due to medical emergency, the authority figure shall involve another authority figure as quickly as possible.

d. A parent present with the child, youth, or at-risk or vulnerable adult when the call is initiated shall serve as the second authority figure.

7. Apps with disappearing message capability shall not be used.

8. Best Practices of Video Conferencing.

a. If using video conferences, one must be sure to understand how the conference works. Most have tutorials to help the leader understand controls and abilities of the software being used.

b. The parent shall be notified of the conference and give permission for their child, youth, or at-risk or vulnerable adult to participate.

c. At least two authority figures shall be on the video at all times.

d. Passwords and waiting rooms shall be used.

e. Parents are always welcome to attend conference videos.

f. All chats shall be open to all participants. No private messages. Turn off peer-to-peer chat so all chat occurs between all participants.

g. Limit screen sharing to hosts only.