

Auburn United Methodist Church

Safe Sanctuary Policy

Adopted 6/9/2014

Preface:

“...Jesus called the children to him and said, “Let the children come to me, and do not stop them: for it is such as these that the kingdom of God belongs. I tell you solemnly, anyone who does not welcome the kingdom of God like a child will never enter it.” Luke 18:16-17

The innocence of children is what best enables them to seek out God with fearless enthusiasm. That innocence is also what leaves them most vulnerable to abuse or neglect. The Auburn United Methodist Church (or AUMC) recognizes that any abuse – physical, sexual or mental – is destructive to the development and well-being of any person. Therefore, AUMC is determined to minimize the risk of abuse or neglect and to protect all participants in programs and activities of AUMC. AUMC will not tolerate and prohibits abuse and bullying at the programs and activities of AUMC. Retaliation or false accusation against a target, witness or another person with reliable information about these matters is prohibited.

AUMC embraces its calling to provide functions, activities and events which are spiritually and developmentally appropriate and free from abuse or neglect. This policy is intended to guide the selection of leaders and caregivers for events and activities at AUMC.

Preamble:

Through baptism we renounce the spiritual forces of wickedness and reject evil powers of this world. We will surround all God’s children with a community of love and forgiveness that they may grow in their trust of God. The faith community lays the foundation for them to grow to be true disciples who walk the way that leads to life. The occurrence of abuse or neglect within the household of God breaks this covenant. Sadly, abuse or neglect remains a reality in today’s society both outside and within the church. AUMC accepts its biblical and moral responsibility to address this issue.

Therefore, this policy is intended to promote the health, welfare and safety of children, youth and vulnerable persons during AUMC functions, activities or events. This document shall be referred to as the Protection Policy, or Policy.

The goals of this policy include:

1. Promoting a safe and nurturing environment for all children, youth and vulnerable persons who participate in events sponsored by AUMC.
2. Protecting children, youth and vulnerable persons from abuse and neglect.
3. Protecting our care providers from false accusations.
4. Minimalizing AUMC liability.

Introduction

Auburn United Methodist Church, hereby referred to as “AUMC”, is expected to uphold this policy as its minimum standards in the establishment of the Safe Sanctuary policy and procedures.

Auburn United Methodist Church seeks to create a safe environment for children, youth and vulnerable adults in which opportunities for abuse are minimized by the provision of proper enlistment and supervision of those persons working with them. This document contains theological foundations, definitions of child abuse, policies and procedures related to prevention, response and reporting.

Purpose 1 – Protect by reducing the risk of injury or abuse of children, youth and vulnerable persons in our care.

Purpose 2 – To protect staff and volunteers at AUMC from false accusations of abuse or neglect.

Purpose 3 – Limit the extent of legal liability for AUMC.

Theological Foundation

Our Biblical Mandate:

Jesus 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 Commitment in Baptism:

The Church, above all institutions, is called to welcome and nurture the child. Our goal is to maintain a safe, secure, loving place where children, youth and vulnerable adults may grow and where those who care for them may administer to their needs in responsible ways.

Our Mandate:

The 1996 General Conference approved a resolution that called upon local churches and annual conferences to institute policies and procedures to reduce the risk of child sexual abuse in our churches and church related activities. AUMC accepts the nature of this call and seeks to expand it to include all forms of abuse or neglect that could be possible in these settings or that could come to our attention regarding those in our care.

Statement of Covenant:

We uphold the idea that to report abuse is to be a witness to the world of the love and justice of God and fully recognize that reporting abuse is a form of ministering to the needs of those crying out for help. Simply, to report abuse can help to stop existing and prevent further abuse.

As caring Christians, we are also committed to protect and advocate for children, youth and vulnerable adults participating in the life of the church. The Church, at all levels of its organization, is entrusted with

the responsibility of providing an emotionally and physically safe, spiritually grounded, healthy environment for children, youth and adults in which they are protected from abuse. (See Addendum A).

Additionally, we care for the abused and their families by offering resources that will contribute to healing. Further, we will recognize the grace that God gives us in upholding Christian community; and we will look for grace filled ways of dealing with both the victim and the accused.

Definitions

Volunteer – a person 16 years of age or older who assists in conducting children’s activities under the supervision of a staff person

Child abuse – harm or threatened harm to a child’s health or welfare by a person responsible for the child’s health or welfare or by a person in a position of trust, which harm occurs or is threatened through a non-accidental physical or mental injury or sexual abuse

Sexual abuse – any touching of the sexual or other intimate parts of a child or any other conduct or action done for the purpose of gratifying the sexual desire of either party either 1) through physical force that overcomes earnest resistance or a threat, express or implied, that places a child in fear of immediate death or serious physical injury to himself or another person or 2) by a person 18 years or older against another who is less than 18 years old, or by a person four or more years older than the victim

Neglect – harm to a child’s health or welfare by a person responsible for the child’s health or welfare which occurs through negligent treatment, including the failure to provide adequate food, clothing, shelter or medical care

Verbal abuse – spoken or unspoken or emotional cruelty against a child

Ritual abuse – regular intentional physical, sexual or psychological violations of a child to appeal to a higher authority of power

Supervision - means to oversee or direct a ministry or activity.

Vulnerable Adult- a person eighteen (18) years of age or older who, because of a mental or physical dysfunction, is unable to manage his/her own resources, carry out the activity of daily living, or protect himself/herself from neglect, exploitation, or a hazardous or abusive situation without assistance from others.

Known Sexual Offender - a person known to the Church who has been convicted of a sexual offense against a child, youth, or adult or who, through their own confession, has admitted to committing a sexual offense against a child, youth or adult, including but not limited to those persons who are going through the legal process, but have not been legally charged or convicted of committing a sexual offense.

Screening Procedures

All persons who intend to work with children, youth or vulnerable adults at AUMC sponsored events, including overnight or longer events, must be properly screened and attend a training session conducted on child protection and abuse and have a background check completed every two years. Documentation of this training will be kept in a confidential file maintained by the Coordinator of Children's Ministry in a locked file cabinet in the office.

Screening and Supervisory Procedures and Policies

- Must complete a volunteer or staff application form.
- Must complete and sign consent for background criminal check and/or drug and alcohol screen. Background checks must be renewed every two years.
- Personal interview conducted with documentation to be kept in a locked cabinet in the Coordinator of Children's Ministry office.
- Written job description and expectations provided to be signed and dated. Provide two references of non-related adults that will be verified.

All files will be maintained in a locked cabinet in the Coordinator of Children's Ministry office.

Coverage

The Policy will be in effect for all AUMC sponsored and advertised events. An event is considered any activity promoted and/or sponsored by AUMC that takes place on church property or at a designated location where the sponsored activity is being held. For an offsite activity, the event begins in the AUMC parking lot if there is transportation or carpooling arranged and continues until the end of the event.

Guidelines for Volunteer and Paid Staff working with Children and Youth and AUMC

- Person should be at least 5 (five) years older than the age group with whom they are working
- Persons leading a group of children or youth should be 18 years of age or older
- 3 month rule: Any volunteer working with children must be a member or attend regularly in the local church for at least three months or work with a member who has been.
- Two Adult rule: Two non-related adults must always be present in groups of children except in emergency situations and where not reasonably feasible
- When the two adult rule is not feasible, the adult supervisor will be required to spot check or make unannounced visits as necessary.
- Doors are never to be locked and are to remain open unless equipped with windows. Staff and volunteers will avoid being alone with a child without being visible to others in the immediate surroundings.

Additional Guidelines

Open door counseling – At any counseling sessions with a child or youth, the door of the room used should remain open for the entire session, if the door has no window in it. The sessions will be conducted at a time when others are nearby (office hours) even if they are not within listening distance.

Restroom procedure – Children should be escorted to the bathroom with the adult remaining outside the bathroom door. The exception is if the child needs assistance, then the 2 adult rule applies.

Nursery care – A sign in/sign out procedure will be in place.

Using photos and videos – Do not post any photos or videos of children or youth from AUMC sponsored events without a photo release form.

Overnight trips/events:

Adult chaperones with children/youth must be the same gender, must never share a bed with a child/youth or be alone in the room with them at any time. Large room multiple bunk settings allow two same gender adults to sleep in the same room with children/youth.

No males shall sleep in the same area as unrelated female persons.

No females shall sleep in the same area as unrelated male persons.

Male participants shall have a male supervisor. Female participants shall have a female supervisor.

If there is an overnigher with both males and females, there must be both a male and female chaperone.

All parents/leaders should have documented contact information exchanged in permission forms and all event information disclosed.

Transportation recommendations:

- All drivers should be screened including a review of their motor vehicle record.
- If using a church bus, trustee guidelines for use of church owned vehicles should be followed.
- When using private vehicles for church-related events, adult must provide updated insurance and follow the two adult rule in each vehicle.
- All children/youth must provide a permission/liability form with emergency information signed by their parent/guardian. These are kept with the leader at all times during the travel event.

Reporting Procedures

Being mindful of the complex nature of Child Abuse Reporting, training and consultation will be available to both clergy and laypersons to prepare them for a faithful response by AUMC.

Incidents of known or suspected abuse/neglect will be reported to the State of Michigan, DHS department. In the case of an emergency, call 911.

Response Procedures

A quick, compassionate and unified response to an alleged incident of child abuse is expected. All allegations will be taken seriously. AUMC personnel are not to undertake any investigation of the incident.

The Bishop and/or his/her designee are the only persons allowed to make statements to the representatives of the media. All requests for statements should be directed to the Director of Communications in the Bishop's office. Training in how to handle media requests will be offered as part of the training. A spirit of cooperation in helping the media find the "official spokesperson" is crucial.

If the allegation is against a staff person or volunteer or if it occurred in the course of a children's or youth activity, the staff person in charge of the activity shall immediately report the incident to the Coordinator of Children's Ministry.

Our Christian Response

While the vast majority of those who work with our programs are of the highest moral character and are deeply committed to the needs of those to whom they minister, the realities of a society where awareness for the potential for abuse or neglect has been heightened makes a consistent screening policy and abuse prevention training necessary. We understand that those with clean backgrounds and records might find this process burdensome or offensive. Yet, if we are to take seriously our responsibility for children, youth and vulnerable adults, all applications for workers and volunteers must be treated in the same manner. We take seriously the need to be careful and thorough in our screening. Further, we live in a litigious society, where the potential exposure of AUMC mandates a need for church-wide policy that is clear and consistently enforced. Thank you for understanding and cooperating as we endeavor to make our programs safe and secure for *all* who participate.

Addendum A

Disclosure of Presence of a Convicted Sex Offender

Secrecy about situations within the church encourage abuse; transparency makes everyone safer. Members and visitors will be regularly screened through the Michigan State Police Sex Offender Registry list. Therefore, immediately after the Pastor or Coordinator of Children's Ministries learns of the presence of a possible convicted sex offender in the congregation, they will gather pertinent public records from the government agencies who arrested and prosecuted the individual.

Step 1: If the individual is a convicted sex offender, the pastor will with professional consultation (which may include insurance representatives, lawyers, United Methodist District or Conference representatives) create a covenant of behavior (see appendix A). The pastor will inform members of the church's program staff that the person is a convicted sex offender; whether he/she has satisfied the court's requirements related to his/her conviction by contacting parole officers; and that a covenant of behavior has been established and is being fulfilled by the individual. The pastor and the program staff will then initiate a process to educate and inform the Trustees, the Church Council and/or volunteers who work with AUMC's children and youth about AUMC's policies and procedures and about the basic facts related to said offender's status as a convicted sex offender.

Step 2: Church leadership will review AUMC's Safe Sanctuary policy, vision and procedures. The Safe Sanctuary Team will also be informed that the individual is a convicted sex offender; that he/she has satisfied the court's requirements related to his conviction; that this covenant has been developed;

At the conclusion of the steps, the covenant between AUMC and the offender will be reviewed and amended if necessary.

Appendix A

Covenant between AUMC congregation and Convicted Sex Offender

This document will be altered to fit the individual in question.

Auburn United Methodist Church is committed to being a religious community open to those who are in need of worshiping with us, especially in times of serious personal troubles. We believe in redemption through God's grace in Jesus Christ and trust that all persons are of sacred worth and loved by God.

However, based on the serious nature of sex offenses and the high rate of recidivism of those convicted of such crimes, we have concerns about anyone convicted of such a crime having contact with children, youth and vulnerable adults in our congregation. The following guidelines are designed to reduce the risk to you and others of an incident or accusation. We welcome you to our congregation but participation will be limited because our first priority is to ensure the safety of our children, youth and vulnerable adults. Further, we also want to assure that you will not be subject to future accusations. This information will be shared in a process outlined in Addendum A.

The ministerial leadership of the church will be responsible for the following duties.

- Church leadership will identify "covenant partners" for you. They will be adults of the same gender as yours. They will not be related to you.
- Designated covenant partners shall be lay members of the church and act as chaperones to facilitate attendance by the sex offender. There must be more than one person willing and trained to act as chaperone to facilitate attendance by the sex offender. Training shall include hospitality, the rules the sex offender must follow, and procedures for questions and emergencies. Such training will be provided by clergy or Coordinator of Children's Ministries.
- Information regarding known sex offenders will be kept on file in the Coordinator of Children's Ministries area of the church, regularly reviewed by staff, and available upon request for all congregation members.
- The leadership of the church will require a signed covenantal agreement limiting the involvement of a known sex offender.
- Request for leadership within the church in ministries not involving children and youth will be reviewed after one year of regular participation, within the guidelines below, and allowed on a case by case basis.
- When staff members join the church, they will be informed of any signed active covenants within the congregation.
- The leadership of the church may seek recommendations outside the church body from professional counsel as deemed necessary.

You are responsible for following the guidelines below:

- Scheduling of covenant partners to accompany you during AUMC sponsored events and if none are available refrain from participating.
- You are to avoid all contact with children on congregation property or congregation sponsored events.
- Do not approach or initiate conversation with children.

- If a child in the congregation approaches you, either at church or in a community place, politely and immediately excuse yourself from the situation.
- Do not volunteer or agree to lead, chaperone or participate in events for children and youth including such things as Sunday school classes, V.B.S., youth group events, or children events, driving or otherwise transporting children or youth.
- Avoid being in the building unaccompanied when activities involving children and youth are in session such as Moms’ Day Out, Parents’ Night Out, Sunday school or youth group activities.
- You are not allowed to be in any non-lit area of the church property.
- At no time shall you deliberately place yourself in or remain in any location in or around the church facilities that would cause undue distress to others. (This prohibits you from being in or near the child care, preschool, elementary, junior high or high school area of the church facilities.)
- If you should decide to relocate to another congregation the membership secretary will seek to inform the leadership of that congregation of the condition of these guidelines.
- You may participate in worship in the sanctuary and adult Sunday school classes.
- At church sponsored functions for families, you may attend with, but at no time leave the immediate proximity of your family or designated covenant partner.

I have reviewed this covenant and agree to abide by its provisions. I understand and agree that if I violate this agreement, I will be denied access to future church functions and church property. We also understand and agree that you will be restricted from access to the church or barred from congregational activities if you refuse to sign this covenant or fail to comply with the stipulations or if behavior threatens the safety of any member of the AUMC congregation.

I understand this contract will be reviewed regularly every six months and will remain for an indefinite period.

_____	_____	_____	_____
Offender	date	Parole Officer (if applicable)	date
_____	_____	_____	_____
Pastor	date	Coordinator of Children’s Ministries	date
_____	_____	_____	_____
Chair of Trustees	date	Council Chair	date