

# Safe Sanctuaries Policy

Reducing the Risk of Abuse in the Church for  
Children, Youth, Seniors, and Vulnerable Adults



Bethel International United Methodist Church

1220 Bethel Road

Columbus, Ohio 43220

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## **OUR MANDATE**

The 1996 General Conference of The United Methodist Church adopted resolution aimed at reducing the risk of child sexual abuse in the church.

### **Why Safe Sanctuary?**

We recognize that accidents may happen but we also acknowledge that many incidents which might occur could be prevented. We are committed to training employees, workers, volunteers and other leaders who are being called to work with children, youth, seniors, and vulnerable adults.

- Acknowledge the risks and develop practical plans to reduce them.
- Take steps to prevent harm, abuse or allegations of abuse to our children, youth and vulnerable adults.
- Continue to answer the call by being in ministry with congregants of every age and vulnerability.

### **State Reporting Requirements**

“Mandated reporters include, but are not limited to, teachers, daycare staff, social workers, school personnel, physicians, dentists, nurses, psychologists, speech pathologists, children services staff, coroners, attorneys and persons rendering spiritual treatment in accordance with tenets of well-organized religions acting in official or professional capacity.

The Ohio Revised Code (ORC) provides immunity from civil or criminal liability for those who make reports in good faith of possible abuse or neglect. The identity of the referral source is confidential and Franklin County Children Services does not release the identification of the referral source to the family. It may only be released to the Ohio Department of Job and Family Services, the prosecutor’s office, law enforcement, or a children services agency as needed. As such, a subpoena for judicial testimony could be issued to a mandated reporter for testimony if the prosecutor determines it is necessary.

A professional or mandated reporter who suspects abuse or neglect and fails to report may be charged criminally. The Ohio Abuse Reporting Laws (ORC: 2151.421) states that mandated reporters must immediately make the abuse or neglect report. For more information, go to <http://codes.ohio.gov/orc/2151.421>

To report child abuse or neglect, call the Franklin County Children Services 24-hour Child Abuse Hotline at 614-229-7000.”

### **Bethel International UMC Reporting Requirements**

All current and future volunteers and staff, compensated or volunteer, who will have the responsibility of supervising the activities and ministries of preschoolers, children, and youth, senior and vulnerable adults, are mandatory reporters. Each is required to read and follow this policy. Supplemental employment policies and all other policies for Bethel Christian Preschool, including but not limited to, the state licensing requirements for the Preschool, will be a covered under a separate policy maintained by the Preschool Director.

## **BIUMC REPORTING PROCEDURES**

Any person having cause to believe a child, youth, senior or vulnerable adult’s physical or mental health or welfare has been or may be adversely affected by abuse or neglect, shall report their suspicion to one of the paid staff members of the church and to the Senior Pastor.

The staff member and Senior Pastor receiving the initial report will be responsible for confirming the facts reported and the condition of the child, youth, or vulnerable adult. All pertinent information and data will be collected through discussions with the initial reporter, other staff members, and the registration records for

the one neglected or abused. The reporter is to collect the data reported and report it to the state agency. It is the State's responsibility to investigate and confirm or not confirm the suspicion.

An Incident Report should be completed to document all information gathered and actions taken. If a church staff is making the call to the state agency, a second person should be present during the phone call to document a report was made. Confidentiality of the investigation must be maintained.

Any accused person will be suspended from any duties with minors, seniors or vulnerable adults until the investigation is completed. The Pastor will keep the family of the victim informed of steps taken and status of the investigation. Church legal counsel should assist in any legal actions.

## **RECRUITING, SCREENING, AND HIRING WORKERS AND VOLUNTEERS**

The appropriate supervisory staff member will be responsible to recruit, screen, hire and train all volunteers for their area and events. The following items should be included for those working with children, youth and adults:

- Position descriptions
- Position application forms
- Personal reference forms
- Consent to criminal background check forms

Confidentiality will be maintained at all times and only designated representatives of the Leadership Board, supervisory staff, and Senior Pastor will have access to these files. During the screening process, if Bethel IUMC finds a person who has been convicted of sexual misconduct or child abuse, they will not be hired or working with our children, youth and vulnerable adults. If information indicates that charges were filed against an applicant, but there was no conviction, then the church will investigate how the issue was resolved by the Senior Pastor and supervisory staff. They will determine if any applicant should or should not be selected to work with children, youth or senior adults. Retention of volunteer records for those no longer volunteering with children, youth, seniors or vulnerable adults will occur for 3 years.

## **Definitions**

- ADULT: any individual who is eighteen years or older.
- CHILD: a person who is under eighteen years of age.
- YOUTH: a person who is a 7th - 12th grade student under the age of 18 years old.
- SPECIAL EVENT WORKER/VOLUNTEER: an adult who serves in an event position on a temporary basis.
- CHILDREN'S AND YOUTH ACTIVITIES: any activity or program in which children or youth are under supervision of staff persons or volunteers.
- PHYSICAL ABUSE: non-accidental injury of a child, youth or vulnerable adult.
- SEXUAL ABUSE: any act of a sexual nature upon or with a child, youth or vulnerable adult.
- RITUAL ABUSE: refers to abuse administered under the guise of religion, including harassment or humiliation, possibly resulting in psychological trauma.
- EMOTIONAL ABUSE: chronic attitude or acts which interfere with the psychological and social development of a child.

Indicators of Child Abuse: All possible signs of physical, emotional, neglect, sexual and ritual abuse will be presented during the Safe Sanctuary Training.

## **BASIC PROCEDURES FOR SAFE MINISTRY**

### **Two Person Rule:**

- Two screened adults present at all times, never to be related persons.

### **Youth Counseling Observation:**

- Door of room propped open.

### **Youth Volunteer Credentials:**

- Should be at least 18 years of age and at least 5 years older than those they are supervising.
- Younger volunteers must be under the supervision of a screened adult.

### **Offsite Events or Field Trip Requirements:**

- Written parental permission required for scheduled off-church property activities, retreats, and overnight activities.
- Additional health/medical forms may be required for some activities.

### **Injury Report Form Requirements:**

- Completed within 24 hours of incident.
- Verbally reported to activity supervisor as soon as possible or within 2 hours. Verbally reported to parents as soon as possible, followed by a copy of the completed form.
- Those injuries requiring EMS notification are to be reported immediately.

### **First Aid/CPR Training Availability:**

- First aid and CPR training will be made available on an annual basis for all church workers with children, youth and vulnerable adults as a basic step to ensure safety. When possible, at least one person trained in first aid and CPR will be on site.

### **Mandatory Annual Orientation for Workers/Volunteers:**

- All workers with children, youth and vulnerable adults whether the workers are paid or volunteer will be required to attend an annual orientation session in which they will be well informed about the Safe Sanctuary Policy of Bethel International United Methodist Church.

### **The "Five-Years-Older" Rule:**

- A worker/volunteer working with children and youth should be five years older than the group of children or youth they are working with.

### **No Unpaired Leaders under the Age of Eighteen:**

- Teens under the age of 18 years old should not be assigned as the sole leaders or workers in any setting. Adults should be assigned as the leader and teens assigned as helpers.

### **Windows in All Classroom Doors:**

- Each room set aside for children and youth should have a door with a window in it or a half door.

### **Appropriate Equipment Knowledge and Adequate Supervision:**

- Volunteers should know how each piece of play equipment is to be used. An adequate number of adults should be with children and youth at all times, with a minimum of at least 2 adults.

**Camping Information:**

- Camping registration forms should be obtained on each participating child or youth. This information should include parental contact, allergies and medical information. All this information should be available to the leaders of the camp or event.

**Qualified Counseling Sessions:**

- Whenever a youth seeks counseling, it is important to determine in the initial meeting if the person is actually qualified to address the youth's needs effectively. If a person does not believe they are sufficiently qualified, the youth can be immediately referred to another counselor.

**Advance Notice to Parents:**

- Providing parents with advance notice and full information about activities must be a guiding principle in Bethel IUMC ministries with children and youth.

**Parent and Family Education Communication:**

- Bethel IUMC will provide Safe Sanctuary Policy information to the congregation and parents. Family members will be invited to learn the facts about abuse and the church's plan through videos, special speakers, printed information, or local law enforcement.

**SOCIAL SETTINGS****Transportation Plans:**

- Bethel IUMC will plan for adequate and safe transportation for any trip.
- Bethel IUMC will plan to have room for each passenger in a seat with a seat belt, space for luggage and equipment, sufficient number of licensed, qualified drivers, first aid supplies, a working cell phone or some other means of communication for an emergency, and a map/GPS for good directions.

**Interpersonal Boundaries in Relationships:**

- An expectation that everyone will treat each other as they would want to be treated themselves.
- In modeling positive, nurturing relationships there will be no profane language, no practical jokes that would be physically or emotionally harmful, no permission for boys to enter the room where girls are sleeping or for girls to enter the room where boys are sleeping, and no permission for two youth (or one adult and one youth) to separate themselves from the group.
- There will be well developed and posted schedule to allow staff, volunteers, and participants to understand where they should be, such as "lights out" and other scheduled activities.
- Adults who express affection for members of the group can do so by hugging in the presence of others without creating the perception that the personal space and privacy of the individual group member is being violated (side hugs are preferred).

**Adult Ministry Issues:**

- At least one person working with a vulnerable adult should be first aid and CPR trained.
- There should be a means of communication to call 911 in case of an emergency.
- Physical accessibility (i.e., wheel chairs, walkers handicapped parking) should be a part of any event planning for seniors and vulnerable adults.

- When counseling older adults, the door can be closed, but the door window or room window shall remain uncovered.
- When traveling with older adults, know the physical limitations of the participants.

## **CYBER SAFETY**

While the Internet and social media offer great promise for developing and deepening ministries, they also pose significant safety challenges.

### **Definitions:**

- **CHURCH-SPONSORED SITES:** any group, page or list-serve that is created by a designated member of Bethel IUMC or any other church for the purpose of establishing, maintaining or growing ministries to and with youth and adults.
- **INAPPROPRIATE CONTENT:** refers to content that is improper or offensive.

### **Minor to Adult Relationships:**

- Adults should not submit “friend” requests to minors or youth. Youth may request friendships with adults, but adults should discern the level of contact they want to maintain prior to responding to these requests.
- When and where available, adults may choose to create separate private and professional profiles on networking sites to create a line of privacy.
- If an adult chooses to accept friend requests from minors or youth, it is recommended that other adults within programs have full access to the profiles and correspondence.
- Adults who choose to accept friend requests from minor or youth should use all privacy settings applicable to shield from any inappropriate content that may exist within the adult’s profile.
- All and any communication that is sent via digital means (i.e., email, social networking site notes or posts, texts) is not confidential and may be reported or shared with others.
- Adults should archive or save all email correspondence.
- It is strongly recommended that “closed” but not “hidden” groups be used. These groups should have both youth and adult administrators.
- Those who work directly with youth are encouraged to use church-sponsored digital communications groups to maintain contact with youth members.
- Social networking site groups should be open to parents of current members.
- Covenants should be created to govern what is appropriate and inappropriate content to be placed and displayed in the online group for Youth Fellowship.
- Any inappropriate material that is not covered by “Mandatory Reporting” laws should be deleted from the site. Any material that is covered by “Mandatory Reporting” laws should be reported to the Senior Pastor, supervisory staff or any member of the Leadership Board.
- Any content that details inappropriate behavior during a church-sponsored event or activity should be addressed by adults.

### **Adult to Adult Relationships:**

- Adult members who seek religious or spiritual advice from clergy via digital means (email, social

networking site posts, etc.) should be informed that their communication is NOT confidential. Use of digital means to communicate nullifies confidentiality.

- When and where available, clergy are encouraged to consider creating a personal and a professional account to maintain appropriate boundaries with Bethel IUMC members or other members' communities of faith.
- Pastors should consider the impact of declining a "friend" request from church members. These encounters may create tension in "real world" relationships.
- Pastors are encouraged to use privacy settings to shield members from viewing content that may be inappropriate.

#### **Video Chats, Blogs or Video Blogs:**

- Adults should refrain from initiating video chats with youth.
- Participants in a video chat or blog should consider what will be shown in the video such as their surroundings, their clothing/state of dress, etc.
- All transcripts of on-line text chats, video chats, blogs or video blogs should be saved when possible.
- All pastors and youth leaders should consider the content and nature of any post that will be read by or visible to youth because it might be perceived as the voice of the church, and may be misconstrued as church policies and procedures.

#### **Publishing and Posting Content Online:**

- Secure signed Media Release forms from parents/guardians of minors who may participate in activities that may be photographed or videoed for distribution.
- When video is distributed of services or activities on the web or via other broadcast media, some form of posting or notification will be given.
- Photos taken at any and all church events for media usage will not have any personal information attached unless prior permission is given.

#### **COMPOSITION OF THE SAFE SANCTUARY COMMITTEE AND ITS OVERSIGHT:**

- The HR Team of the Leadership Board, Senior Pastor, Church Administrator, and Supervisory Staff.
- The Committee will oversee the implementation of this Safe Sanctuary Policy and the safekeeping of the application, reference, background screening and consent forms at the church.
- The Committee should review the Safe Sanctuary Policy annually and may make any needed modifications to the policy.

#### **SEE ATTACHMENT FOR ALL SAFE SANCTUARY FORMS TO THIS POLICY**