



Cornerstone United Methodist Church Children and Youth Protection Policy

Introduction:

The General Conference of The United Methodist Church in 1996 adopted a resolution aimed at reducing the risk of child abuse in the church. The adopted resolution, continued in 2000, 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.”

Tragically, churches have not always been safe places for children. Child sexual abuse, exploitation and ritual abuse (ritual abuse refers to abusive acts committed as part of ceremonies or rites; ritual abusers are often related cults) occur in churches, both large and small, urban and rural. The problem cuts across all economic, cultural, and racial lines. It is real, and it appears to be increasing. Most annual conferences can cite specific incidents of child sexual abuse and exploitation in their churches. Virtually every congregation has among its members adult survivors of early sexual trauma.

Such incidents are devastating to all who are involved; the child, the family, the local church, and its leaders. Increasingly, churches are torn apart by the legal, emotional and monetary consequences of litigation following allegations of abuse.

God calls us to make our churches safe places, protecting children and other vulnerable persons from sexual and ritual 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 – 2000 pp. 180-181)

Thus, in covenant with other United Methodist congregations, Cornerstone United Methodist Church in Elgin, Illinois adopts this policy for the prevention of child abuse and the abuse of youth in our church.

Purpose:

Our congregation’s purpose for establishing this Child and Youth Protection Policy and accompanying procedures is to demonstrate our absolute and unwavering commitment to the physical safety and spiritual growth of all of our children and youth, and to reduce the risk of abuse occurring in our church.

Statement of Covenant:

As a Christian community of faith, and a United Methodist congregation, we pledge to conduct the ministry of the Gospel in ways that assure the safety and spiritual growth of all our children and youth, as well as the safety and spiritual growth of those persons who work with children and youth.

- We follow reasonable safety measures in the selection and recruitment of workers.
- We implement prudent operational procedures in all programs and events.
- We educate our workers with children and youth regarding the use of all appropriate policies and methods.
- We have clearly defined procedures for reporting a suspected incident of abuse that conforms to the requirements of the State of Illinois. Our volunteers and paid staff are instructed to report all suspected incidents of abuse.
- We are prepared to respond to media inquiries if an incident occurs.
- We inform parents of our policies, and provide training for our teachers and other workers with children and youth regarding our policies.

Conclusion:

In all of our ministries with children and youth, this congregation is committed to demonstrating the love of Jesus Christ through the provision of a safe and sacred place where children may learn and grow in faith.

Procedures:**Response of a teacher, leader, or other child or youth worker who witnesses or suspects an incident of child abuse**

A teacher, leader, or other child or youth worker shall:

1. Ensure the safety of the child. Do not confront the alleged abuser.
2. Immediately report your knowledge to the Directing Pastor or other appropriate staff member. If a paid staff member is involved in the incident, the incident shall be reported immediately to the chair of the Personnel Committee.

Church response to a report of child abuse against a volunteer or staff member of the church

If the accused is a volunteer, the primary persons to respond to any such allegations will be the Director of Lay Ministries or the Youth Director. In their absence, the Directing Pastor will respond. If the accused is a staff person, the primary person is the chair of the Personnel Committee. In the absence of the chair of the Personnel Committee the Ministry Council Chair will respond.

The primary response shall be: (These responses will be completed by the Personnel Committee or their designee)

1. Notification of the parent(s) or guardian(s) of the alleged victim and ensure the child's safety until the parent(s) or guardian(s) arrival. The safety of the alleged victim is the church's primary concern.

2. Treat the accused with dignity, but immediately remove him/her from further involvement with the child or youth. The accused abuser shall not be confronted “in the moment.”
3. Notify the Directing Pastor and the proper law enforcement or child protective service agency. (Police: 911; DCFS: 1-800-25ABUSE)
4. Notify the District Superintendent (Elgin District Office: 847-931-0710; Elgin District Parsonage: 847-488-0770), the Bishop of the Northern Illinois Conference of The United Methodist Church (Bishop’s Office: 312-346-9766), the church’s insurance agent and the church’s attorney.
5. Keep a written record of all actions taken by the church in response to the allegation (see reporting form).
6. Call the Chair of the Personnel Committee (Barb and Steve Johnson: 815-784-5434) or the Directing Pastor (Parsonage: 847-464-4671) to make any necessary statements or response to the media.
7. Prepare a brief, honest statement that can be made to the congregation without giving unnecessary details, placing blame, interfering with the victim’s or the accused’s privacy, or violating confidentiality concerns.
8. Be prepared to interface (using appropriate protocol) with law enforcement officials, child protective services, and authorities of the church.
9. A spokesperson for the congregation shall be named in consultation with the Chair of the Personnel Committee and the District Superintendent who shall work with and coordinate efforts with the media relations person for the Northern Illinois Conference of The United Methodist Church. The spokesperson for the congregation is the only person who may speak to the media on behalf of the congregation and shall be authorized to answer questions. The congregational spokesperson shall answer questions honestly without adding extra or unnecessary information. The congregational spokesperson may answer questions saying, “I (We) do not know at this time.”

(Adopted from: Safe Sanctuaries: Reducing the Risk of Child Abuse in the Church by Joy Thornburg Melton.)

Confidentiality:

We must assume that an allegation against a person may or may not be true. A person is innocent until proven guilty. Therefore, the details to the allegations should be kept confidential until such time as the allegations are proven and released to the media, or church officials. A public statement that an alleged incident has occurred, naming the offence but not naming the alleged victim or accused should be immediately formulated after the alleged victim has been cared for and the details of the incident are recorded. Children’s names should never be released. Confidential information is not secret information. Confidential information is that information which is shared only on a “need-to-know” basis and then only with those persons with a legitimate need to know (e.g.: church officials, pastor, church staff, Chair of the Personnel Committee, District Superintendent, Bishop, law enforcement officials, child protective services officials, the church’s attorney, the victim’s attorney, the accused’s attorney, and the like).

Current Safety Procedures:

1. **Two Adult Rule:** No fewer than two adults present at all times during any church sponsored program, event, or ministry involving children or youth. Express permission must be obtained by parent/guardian of a child/youth when working in a mentoring situation (one on one).
2. At no times is it appropriate for children to be left unattended or alone to wander the building.
3. **Sign-in/Sign-Out:** For children under the age of 1st Grade, a parent or guardian must sign the child in making sure to receive a parent tag that matches the child's nametag. Only the person with the matching parent tag will be allowed to sign a child out of the classroom.
4. Parents or guardians must pick Elementary children up in their classrooms unless the parent or guardian has signed the blue registration card giving us permission to release their child.
5. **Six Month Rule:** A volunteer must have been part of Cornerstone United Methodist Church for at least six months before working with children or youth in a leadership capacity.
6. Photographs of children and youth will not be published (fliers, brochures, web site and other forms of publicity) without a signed Photo Release form, but may be displayed within the church.
7. **Volunteer Covenants & Background Checks:** Volunteers will be required to complete an authorization form for a criminal background check and sign a "Volunteer Covenant Statement."
8. Evacuation procedures shall be posted and practiced.

Annual Review

The Personnel Team (Staff-Parish Relations Committee) will be responsible for review of the Child Youth Protection Policy on an annual basis and will recommend changes, as needed, to the Ministry Council.

Anyone who has any questions or concerns about this policy or the issues addressed is encouraged to air those questions or concerns to the chair of the Personnel Team (Staff-Parish Relations Committee) or the pastor in charge, by calling 847/464-HOPE (4673) or email paulmeyers@umc-cornerstone.org