

OTTERBEIN UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

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SAFE SANCTUARIES POLICY

(Formerly Child Protection Policy)

First Adopted by the East Ohio Conference: June 1998

First Adopted by Otterbein United Methodist Church: May 2000

Revised policy adopted by the Otterbein United Methodist Church Council on 6/8/2015.

OTTERBEIN UNITED METHODIST CHURCH SAFE SANCTUARIES POLICY

I. PURPOSE

People were bringing little children to him in order that he might touch them; and the disciples spoke sternly to them. But when Jesus saw this, he was indignant and said to them "Let the little children come to me; do not stop them; for it is to such as these that the kingdom of God belongs. Truly, I tell you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will never enter it. And he took them up in his arms, laid his hands on them, and blessed them." (Mark 10:13-16)

This incident from the ministry of Jesus speaks of the value our Lord placed on children and the example of faith that they provide for the rest of us. As followers of Jesus, we understand that children/youth are inherently valuable members of Christ's community. Jesus highlighted not only the faith and openness of children, but also their vulnerability. This vulnerability puts children at risk, but it also places them close to God. Their dependence on God may be what Jesus was trying to get his disciples to see as a model for their own faith. This vulnerability and dependence makes the protection and support of the community of faith even more important. Jesus was teaching that, within the community of believers, there must be protection for each of us in our dependence on God and on each other. As followers of Christ, we resolve to protect children in their vulnerability and also to learn from them as we all grow in the faith.

Our culture appears to be experiencing an increase in the incidence of child abuse and neglect. As much as we do not like to think about abusive and hurtful things happening in the church, it is clear that it is our duty as the Church to guard and protect the children, youth, church staff member, and volunteers who participate in our ministries.

The purpose of the Safe Sanctuaries Policy of the Otterbein United Methodist Church is:

1. To provide procedures specifically designed to protect children, youth, church staff members, and volunteers associated with the activities of the church.
2. To establish appropriate ways of responding to alleged, reported, or suspected incidents of abuse.
3. To be in a compassionate ministry with the affected persons, the alleged victim, the alleged victim's family, the accused, the accused's family, and the church family.

We hereby resolve to put into practice the procedures set forth herein with the intent to:

1. Safeguard the children/youth of our church from abuse and neglect.
2. Respond to all allegations in a fair and compassionate manner.
3. Protect church staff and volunteers from potential false allegations of abuse.
4. Limit the extent of our church's legal risk and liability.
5. Strengthen our Christian education/youth ministries.

II. DEFINITION OF ABUSE

“Child abuse” consists of any of the following:

1. Engaging in any sexual activity with a child, as defined under Chapter 2907 of the Ohio Revised Code; or
2. Endangering a child, as defined in Section 2919.22 of the Ohio Revised Code**; or
3. Denying, as a means of punishment, proper or necessary subsistence, education, medical care, or other care necessary to a child for the child’s health; or
4. Using restraint procedures on a child that may cause injury or pain; or
5. Administering prescription drugs to a child without the written approval and ongoing supervision of a licensed physician; or
6. Providing alcoholic beverages or controlled substances to a child; or
7. Commissioning any intentional act that results in any injury or death to a child; or
8. Inflicting physical or mental injury that threatens to harm a child’s health, welfare, or safety.

**In its present form, this law defines “child endangerment” to include any of the following: (1) abuse; or (2) torture or cruel abuse; or (3) corporal punishment or other physical discipline (e.g., such as spankings) or prolonged cruel restraint, which is excessive under the circumstances, and which could likely physically injure the child; or (4) repeated, uncalled-for discipline which, if continued, would seriously impair the child’s mental health or development; or (5) involving the child in any obscene, sexually-oriented, or nudity-oriented activity or conduct.

III. SELECTION AND SCREENING OF CHURCH STAFF AND VOLUNTEERS

Although our Christian concern for children/youth leads us to be saddened when any form of child abuse takes place anywhere, our major policy need is to be certain that abuse does not occur within the framework of any Otterbein United Methodist Church program or ministry with children/youth. This policy is intended to help our congregation make Otterbein United Methodist Church a truly safe and caring place.

In an effort to create a safe environment within our church, all church staff members and volunteers who work with the church’s children/youth programs either regularly or occasionally, on or beyond the church ground, will be screened and will be trained on child protection issues.

The procedure for selecting and screening is as follows: The Staff Parish Relations Committee may set additional screening and performance standards for paid staff.

1. Each person being considered to work with children/youth in any church program, whether as a volunteer or paid staff person, shall complete an application form and submit to a background check with "Protect My Ministry" through the East Ohio Conference contract. (or copy of fingerprinting for work, for example Teaching, medical).
2. In accordance with Ohio State law (Senate Bill #38), applicants for any paid positions (hired after October 29, 1993) must be fingerprinted and a background check conducted. For persons who have lived in Ohio for the past five years, an Ohio background check must be conducted. For persons who have not lived in Ohio for the past five years, an FBI background check must be conducted.
3. Before placing the applicant in a position of responsibility, the pastor, church staff member, or lay person responsible for the ministry will review the submitted application and results from the background check to determine if the applicant will be interviewed. Indications that an interview must take place include:
 - a. The person is a newcomer to Otterbein United Methodist Church and/or to the area Navarre, Ohio.
 - b. The person wants to work alone.
 - c. The person or background check has indicated that he/she has been charged with a crime against children or youth. (Persons who have been previously convicted or have pleaded guilty or no contest to a crime against children or youth will not be placed in a position involving access to children or youth.)
 - d. Upon checking references, issues are raised which require clarification.

Interviews will follow the interview guidelines provided in this policy and be conducted by the pastor, church staff member, the layperson responsible for the ministry, or through the use of a designated person(s).

The results of the interview, especially when sensitive areas have been discussed, should be kept confidential and only disclosed to those persons requiring this information in order to make a decision as to whether the applicant should be accepted as a volunteer.

4. Before beginning work with either children or youth, each volunteer will:
 - Sign a statement that he/she has read, has understood, and has agreed to abide by the church's Safe Sanctuaries Policy. (Such statement is a part of the application form.)
 - Participate in child safety training as detailed in section VII: Education of Persons Who Work with Children and Youth.

In the unfortunate situation where it has been determined that an applicant should not work with children/youth, the church needs to handle such a decision in a confidential manner which is sensitive to that person.

IV. SUPERVISION OF CHILDREN AND YOUTH

Emergency Medical/Permission Forms

Emergency Medical/Permission Forms (EMPFs) need to be completed and updated by the parent and/or guardian each year for all children, youth and adults involved in the programs of the church. This form includes medical treatment information, permission for all activities that do not involve travel or overnight stays, as well as parental/guardian permission for OUMC to post photos on websites, publications, and bulletin boards. A master copy and a portable copy of the forms will be kept in the church office. It is the activity facilitator's responsibility to carry the portable copy of the forms during his/her events. A separate event-specific permission form is required for all events that involve travel or overnight stays.

Supervision of Classroom Activities

A concerted effort will be made to provide at least two adults for all classroom activities involving children and youth. When two adults are not available, a designated person will periodically check the rooms and be aware of the children/youth's whereabouts if they leave the classroom area. While recognizing the important role of youth volunteers in children/youth ministries and in an effort to ensure a safe environment, all activities involving children and youth will be supervised by at least one adult who is nineteen years of age or older. Persons supervising activities must be at least 5 years older than the children or youth they are supervising.

Supervision of Non-Classroom Activities

With the exception of the circumstances identified under Special Rules for Supervision of Specific Activities, at least two adults will be present for all non-classroom activities involving children/youth.

Special Rules for Supervision of Specific Activities

1. **Child/Youth Counseling:** In instances of child counseling where circumstances dictate that counseling is most effective on a one-on-one basis, a church staff or volunteer may meet individually with a child with the awareness and previous consent of that individual's parent or legal guardian. Exceptions to consent may be made for emergencies. In instances of youth counseling where circumstances dictate that counseling is most effective on a one-on-one basis, a church staff or volunteer may meet individually with the youth in an open and/or visible setting.
2. **Church Choirs:** For choir rehearsals, a church staff member or volunteer may meet, without the presence of another adult, with a group of children or youth with the awareness and previous consent of those individuals' parents or legal guardians.

Dismissal from Group Events: In group events, it may be inevitable that one child's or youth's transportation from the event arrives after all other children/youths' transportation has arrived. In those circumstances, a child/youth may unavoidably be in the individual presence of an adult. Because this circumstance may be simply unavoidable, the general rule which requires the presence of two adults is suspended and the adult is responsible for

exercising his/her best judgment for the child or youth's well-being. Youth are not allowed to leave the church unsupervised during an event without parental permission on file. Parents will be notified of any infractions of this policy.

Off-Site, Trip and Retreat Supervision

- There shall be at least two adults present for all trips, retreats, and other times that children/youth gather at or away from the church building.
- There shall be at least one adult of each gender present at co-ed overnight events. At single gender overnight events, at least one of the two or more adults present will be of the same gender as the children/youth.
- In situations where two adults are not available per room where children/youth are staying overnight, then no adult should stay alone in a specific room with the children/youth. Parents should be made aware of housing accommodations.
- Permission slips including permission for emergency medical care shall be carried by the person in charge of each trip and/or retreat.

Driving and Transportation

- Drivers must be known to the designated leader of the event.
- Drivers must have a current "Receipt by Persons Designated to Provide Transportation to or from Church Events for Otterbein United Methodist Church" form on file as well as a valid state driver's license, proof of insurance, and be at least 21 years old.
- Drivers must obey all traffic laws and speed limits.
- All passengers including adults must use an individual seat belt while traveling.
- Drivers must transport more than one student at a time unless they have express parental permission.
- Students are not permitted to drive as part of youth events, transporting other youth.
- A minimum of one copy of the EMPFs is needed per vehicle in the caravan.

Open Door Policy

Parents/guardians, volunteers, or staff of the church may visit and observe the program at any time.

Sign-In/Sign-Out Procedure

Persons responsible for children, infants through second grade, will register their children and indicate the pre-authorized person(s) to whom their children may be signed out for Sunday School, VBS and other children's activities.

Record Retention

All children/youth activities should have a written record of the names of participants and supervisors. Records should be kept for at least three years.

V. OTTERBEIN UMC POLICY ON SOCIAL NETWORKING AND BLOGGING

In general, Otterbein UMC views social networking sites (e.g. Facebook, MySpace, Twitter), personal websites, weblogs and twitter accounts positively and respects the right of participants and paid/volunteer staff to use them as a medium of self-expression. If a person chooses to identify himself or herself as a participant or paid/volunteer staff at a church sponsored event on such Internet venues, some readers of such websites, blogs or tweets may view the participant or paid/volunteer staff as a representative or spokesperson of the church. In light of this possibility, Otterbein UMC requires, as a condition of participation in the event, that participants and paid/volunteer staff observe the following guidelines when referring to Otterbein United Methodist Church, its programs or activities, its participants, and /or paid/volunteer staffs in a blog, on a social networking site, on a website or in a tweet:

1. Participants and paid/volunteer staff must be respectful in all communications related to or referencing Otterbein UMC, its programs or activities, its participants, and /or paid/volunteer staffs.
2. Participants and paid/volunteer staff must not use obscenities, profanity, or vulgar language.
3. Participants and paid/volunteer staff must not use blogs, personal websites, networking sites or tweets to disparage Otterbein UMC, its programs or activities, its participants, and/or paid/volunteer staff.
4. Participants and paid/volunteer staff must not use blogs, personal websites, networking sites or tweets to harass, bully, or intimidate participants, or paid/volunteer staff of events sponsored by Otterbein UMC. Behaviors that constitute harassment and bullying include, but are not limited to, comments that are derogatory with respect to race, religion, gender, sexual orientation, color, disability, sexually suggestive, humiliating, or demeaning comments, and threats to stalk, haze, or physically injure another person.
5. Participants and paid/volunteer staff must not use blogs, personal websites, networking sites or tweets to discuss engaging in conduct that is prohibited by Otterbein UMC Policies, including, but not limited to, the use of alcohol and illegal drugs, sexual behavior, sexual harassment, and bullying.

Any participant found to be in violation of any portion of this policy may be unable to register for future Otterbein UMC sponsored events. Any paid/volunteer staff found to be in violation of any portion of this policy may be subject to appropriate disciplinary action, up to and including dismissal.

VI. RESPONSE BY CHURCH WORKERS TO INJURIES AND ACCIDENTS

In order to ensure proper attention was given to an injury or accident, an incident report must be completed by the adult supervisor within 24 hours of the incident whenever a child/youth is injured. (See attached form on page 19.)

VII. RESPONSE BY CHURCH WORKERS TO ALLEGATIONS OF ABUSE

As caring Christians, we are committed to protect and to be advocates for children/youth participating in the life of the church. The Church is entrusted to provide an emotionally safe, spiritually grounded, healthful environment for children, youth, and 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 abuse to stop potentially existing abuse and to prevent further abuse. To report abuse is to be a 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. If that person is uncomfortable reporting the incident to the pastor, then the alleged abuse should be reported to the Chairperson of the Staff Parish Relations Committee or the chairperson of Church Council or the District Superintendent. The person reporting the incident and the pastor or other person consulted shall seek advice of the church's attorney to determine if the incident requires reporting under state law. If so, the pastor or other person consulted will follow these guidelines:

1. The suspected abuse shall be immediately reported to Children Services or the local law enforcement agency. This is a requirement of the law. (Reference section 2151.421 of The Ohio Revised Code.) Do not attempt an investigation. This should be left to professionals who are familiar with these cases.

COMPLIANCE WITH THE PROVISIONS OF THIS POLICY IN NO WAY ELIMINATES THE REQUIREMENT THAT CERTAIN EMPLOYEES COMPLY WITH THE MANDATORY REPORTING REQUIREMENTS OF OHIO REVISED CODE SECTION 2151.421.

Ohio Revised Code Section 2151.421 requires mandatory reporting of suspected abuse and neglect. It requires employees of day care centers and child care agencies, and "any persons rendering spiritual treatment through prayer in accordance with the tenets of a well-recognized religion" to make reports to child protective services. These reports must be made if the individual knows or suspects that a child faces threat of suffering any physical or mental wound, injury, disability, or condition of a nature that reasonably indicates abuse neglect of the child. In Stark County that report is made by calling 330.455.kids. Your name will be kept strictly confidential.

IT IS NOT SUFFICIENT FOR THE EMPLOYEE TO MERELY REPORT TO HIS OR HER SUPERVISOR. HE OR SHE MUST REPORT DIRECTLY TO CHILD PROTECTIVE SERVICES AS WELL.

2. 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. (See attached form on page 20) This form is to be completed by the person who observed the suspected abuse or to whom the suspected abuse was disclosed.

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 East Ohio Conference, where it will be placed in a secure file.

3. After having reported the suspected abuse to Children Services or the local law enforcement agency, the incident is to be reported immediately to the church insurance company and district superintendent by the pastor(s) or administrative staff of the church. The district superintendent will report the allegation to the bishop's office. Do not try to handle this without professional outside assistance.
4. The pastor(s) will notify the parents. Do not prejudge the situation, but take the allegations seriously and reach out to the victim and the victim's family. Showing care and support help to prevent further hurt. Extend whatever pastoral resources are needed. Remember that the care and safety of the victim is the first priority. Responding in a negative or non-supportive manner to the alleged victim may increase the anger and pain of the victim and the victim's family. Future reconciliation will be more difficult and the possibility of conflict increases.
5. Once Children Services or the local law enforcement agency has been contacted and the safety of the child or youth member is secured, the pastor(s) will tell the accused that a report has been made. The accused will be treated with dignity and support. 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 of the church, arrangements should be made to either maintain or suspend his or her income until the allegations are cleared or substantiated.
6. The pastor, district superintendent, or bishop's offices should inform the alleged victim, the alleged victim's family, the accused, and the accused's family of the existence of the Child Protection Resource committee of the East Ohio Conference. This committee's mission is to support, guide, and offer options to the alleged victim, the alleged victim's family, the accused, the accused's family, the pastor, and the district superintendent. This committee is appointed by the bishop and may include, but not be limited to, a licensed counselor/social worker with child abuse treatment experience, a licensed psychologist or psychiatrist with child abuse treatment experience, an attorney, a lay person who is a parent and a clergy person.
7. Any contact with the media shall be handled by the pastor, district superintendent, bishop, or their designated representative. 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.

VIII. EDUCATION OF PERSONS WHO WORK WITH CHILDREN AND YOUTH

Regularly scheduled training focused on issues of abuse will be provided by the church for those working with children and youth. Attendance at this training or a district/conference sponsored training session shall be required of all adults who will have direct contact with children or youth in the church's ministry. The church will assume the cost of training its workers.

The training may include:

1. Definition and recognition of abuse.
2. The church's policies on reporting abuse
3. The purposes of the policy as protection for children/youth and for church staff/volunteer workers
4. The meaning and importance of confidentiality
5. The role of one who hears a disclosure
6. Report forms
7. Maintaining a positive learning classroom environment, including appropriate discipline
8. Appropriate behavior for teachers and leaders
9. Common age-level characteristics

Training will also be required for youth who volunteer with children's ministries. Such training should include:

1. Maintaining a positive learning classroom environment, including appropriate discipline
2. Appropriate behavior for teachers and leaders
3. Common age-level characteristics

The Staff Parish Relations Committee shall develop ways of educating the congregation on abuse, its effects, and Otterbein United Methodist Church policies on screening and reporting abuse.

