

# **SAFE SANCTUARY POLICY FOR THE PROTECTION OF CHILDREN, YOUTH, AND VULNERABLE ADULTS FROM ABUSE**

Hibben United Methodist Church - **REVISED September 2019**

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, exploitation and ritual abuse (ritual abuse refers to abusive acts committed as part of ceremonies or rites; ritual abusers are often related to cults, or pretend to be) 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. 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*. P. 384-386)

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

## **Purpose**

Our purpose for establishing this Child 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. While the language of the policy most often refers to children and/or youth, the policies and procedures apply also to ministry with any vulnerable adults who need our special protection.

## **Covenant Statement**

Hibben 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 and youth as well as all of our workers with children and youth. 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 and youth on our procedures and policies; and we will have a clearly defined procedure for reporting a suspected incident of abuse consistent with South Carolina 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).

# **Policy**

## ***I. Qualifications for Workers with Children and Youth***

### **A. Age**

In recruiting volunteers and hiring employees to work with children and youth in any position of authority, workers must be at least 21 years of age and at least 5 years older than the age of the persons they are working to serve. This standard allows persons to be separated by enough years to have perspective and recognition as an authority figure with the group they are serving. Persons not meeting these standards may not serve as an approved adult leader; however, they may be utilized as assistants to those in leadership positions.

### **B. Six Month Rule**

Hibben United Methodist Church will not use anyone as an approved adult leader for children or youth in the church unless they have been actively involved at Hibben for at least six (6) months. Volunteers within their first six months of church involvement may serve as assistants to approved adults.

In the case of paid staff the 6-month rule does not apply however they are subject to the normal probationary period as outlined in the Employee Handbook.

## ***II. Screening Procedures***

All of the following requirements must be completed but in no specific order:

### **A. Forms**

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

### **B. Reference Checks**

Each volunteer or employee shall provide three non-related references. For employees references should include former supervisors. Applicants must supply the name and contact information for three character references on their application form.

### **C. Background Checks**

Criminal background checks shall be made of all clergy, church employees and all adult volunteers (over 18 years of age) to the extent permitted by law, prior to employment or volunteering in children or youth ministry at Hibben. This is to determine current or historic child abuse or sexual misconduct, criminal records, or violent or pedophilic behavior.

The church will designate a staff person to be responsible for overseeing the background-check process.

Background checks will be repeated at intervals not to exceed five years.

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.

### **D. Interview**

Applicants may be interviewed for suitability for the work they desire to do by the leader of the program in which the applicant will work or by other persons designated by the program leader.

### **E. Child Abuse Survivor Applicants**

Adult survivors of childhood physical or sexual abuse need the love and acceptance of this church family. A person's experience with abuse and their recovery process may be pertinent to their suitability as youth and children's ministry workers. Applicants who are survivors of abuse should discuss this in confidence with a pastor.

## **F. 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 church will designate a staff person to be responsible for the storing of applicant information.

## **G. Required Forms and Signatures**

In addition to volunteer application and reference forms, all applicants will sign "Authorization and Request for Criminal Background Check" and "Participant's Covenant Statement" forms as part of the application process. A Participant's Covenant Statement must be signed biennially.

## **H. Training**

All adult and staff workers with children, youth, and vulnerable adults must complete Safe Sanctuary Training. See the subsequent section on training.

# **III. Procedures and Guidelines**

All children and/or youth programs, events, and classes affiliated with Hibben United Methodist Church will be governed by the following guidelines:

## **A. Alcohol/Illegal Drugs**

No adult or participant taking part in a church sanctioned children/youth ministry, on or off church property will use, possess, consume or be under the influence of alcohol or illegal drugs, this does not apply to the sacrament of Communion.

## **B. Two-adult rule**

Two non-related, screened and approved adults must be on the premises and if possible in each room whenever children or youth activities are going on. If it is not feasible to have two approved adults in each room, a roaming approved adult with an unobstructed line of sight into each room must be present. One approved adult must be in each room. During overnight activities on and off the premises, in a mixed gender group there must be both male and female approved leaders.

Children and Youth should be in church buildings only when participating in scheduled activities and must remain in supervised areas.

For ministries with children under the age of five years, Hibben will have a worker to children ratio equal to or lower than DSS regulations allow.

birth to 1 year: 1:5  
1-2 years: 1:6  
2-3 years: 1:7  
3-4 years: 1:11  
4-5 years: 1:16

*Along with those specific age group ratios, DSS policy states that "When there are mixed age groups in the same room, the staff:child ratio shall be consistent with the age of the majority of the children when no infants or toddlers are in the mixed age group. When infants or toddlers are in the mixed age group, the staff:child ratio for infants and toddlers shall be maintained." "When there is no majority defining age group, always determine the ratio by the youngest age child."*

## **C. Sign-in and Sign-out Procedure**

All children third grade and younger must be signed in and out of all activities by their parent, guardian or a designated adult. Children's Church is an exception to this requirement.

## **D. Emergency Medical Information and Liability Form**

An Emergency Medical Information and Liability Form must be completed for each child and/or youth participating in any Hibben program or activity. This Medical/Liability form may be completed for a one-year period and must be renewed annually. The adult in charge of any activity will obtain an emergency contact number for any visiting child who does not have a Medical/Liability Form on file.

## **E. Open Door Policy**

Parents, 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.

## **F. Doors and Windows**

Every room specifically designated for activities involving children and youth shall have a door with a window in it or have a half-door. Windows must not be obstructed by adornment.

## **G. 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 the Reporting section of this policy.

## **H. Touch**

Physical affection should be appropriate to the age of the child or youth. (For example, it is generally appropriate for a four-year-old to sit in a nursery worker's lap and give a kiss on the cheek, but it is not appropriate for a teenager and youth leader to behave this way.)

Touching should be a response to the child's need for comfort, encouragement, or affection. It should not be based upon the adult's emotional need.

Ideally, touching and affection should only be given when in the presence of other children's ministry or youth workers. It is much less likely that touches will be inappropriate or misconstrued as such when two adult workers are present and the touching is open to observation. This is especially important when diapering a baby or helping a young child change clothes or use the restroom.

The door will be left open when helping a young child in the restroom.

Touching behavior should not give even the appearance of wrongdoing. As ministry workers our behavior must foster trust at all times; it should be above reproach.

A child's preference not to be touched should be respected. Do not force affection upon a reluctant child. Church workers are responsible to protect children under their supervision from inappropriate touching by others.

Church workers must promptly discuss inappropriate touching or other questionable behavior by other workers with their ministry leader, staff member, or a pastor.

## **I. Classroom Discipline**

All teachers and workers will use discipline measures such as:

If a child is behaving inappropriately, the teacher or worker will tell the child specifically what he/she is doing that is not acceptable and state what the expected behavior is, e.g., "We do not throw the blocks. We use blocks for building."

If this measure is not effective, the child will be guided to another activity.

If inappropriate behavior continues, the child may be placed at a table to work alone away from the other students.

If the child's disruptive behavior interferes with the safety of other children or the learning environment, a teacher will notify the staff member responsible for the program or the Director of the Preschool, who will talk with the child and work with the child's parent. In extreme circumstances, the child's parent may be called to remove the child.

If a child is injured, such as by biting or hitting, an incidence report will be filled out by the adult witnessing the incident and signed by the director. A copy of the Incident Report will be given to the parent.

**No physical punishment or verbal abuse, e.g., ridicule, are to be used at any time.**

## **J. Gifts**

Gift giving can be a form of buying loyalty or silence, gift giving should be done on a group basis, or for special occasions only. Gifts may not be elaborate but should be modest and appropriate to the occasion. In the case of charitable gifts for known financial needs, the pastors should be consulted.

## **K. Off-Premises Events**

1. If both boys and girls are participating, the adult leadership shall include both male and female approved leaders.
2. Emergency Medical Information and liability form must be completed for each child and/or youth participating in any Hibben activity and available during the activity. This Medical/liability form may be completed for a one-year period and must be renewed annually.
3. A Permission Form must be signed by parent or guardian and the child or youth participating in any off- premises activity. Permission forms may be completed for a one-year period and must be renewed annually.
4. There must be access to a phone, cell phone, or pager when groups are away from the church property.
5. In no circumstance is one adult to take a child, children or youth on an outing alone. On overnight outings, there will be a 1:5 adult to youth/children supervision ratio.
6. Sleeping arrangements: In no circumstance, will one adult and one child (other than parent/child) share a room alone. No adult (other than parent) will share a bed with a child/youth. Sleeping areas will not be mixed-gender unless it is a family group. Other than these circumstances, sleeping arrangements may vary due to the number of female and male participants and chaperones and the specific sleeping accommodations (such as bunk rooms or hotel-type rooms). Every effort will be made to notify parents ahead of time of sleeping arrangements.
7. Transportation
  - a. All drivers for children/youth activities must be a screened and approved adult volunteer or staff person and have received a DMV background check.
  - b. A copy of their current driver's license and proof of insurance must be provided.
  - c. All outings will leave from and return to the church with no teenage drivers. Any exceptions must have prior approval of the activity leader.
  - d. Only in the case of an emergency, or a parent and child, will one adult transport one child/youth. Ideally there will be two adults in each vehicle. The minimum requirement is one adult and two or more children/youth.
  - e. All drivers will follow a prescribed route and meet at designated checkpoints or final destination. Cell phone numbers should be shared among drivers.
8. For off-premises events, at least one staff or volunteer member must be CPR and Basic First Aid certified.

## **IV. Training**

### **A. Orientation Training**

All approved adult volunteers and staff who work with children and youth, will complete orientation training prior to beginning service.

The orientation training will include information, explanation, and discussion of:

1. Statistics and education to facilitate an understanding of child/youth abuse.
2. Behaviors or other indicators which may signal problems.
3. The Hibben UMC Safe Sanctuary Policy
4. Requirement of SC state law for reporting incidents of abuse.
5. Procedures for response to incidents or allegations of abuse and for reporting such incidents.

## **B. Advanced training on child abuse**

All paid staff who regularly work with children and youth are required to attend at least one additional outside training session on the subject of child abuse (such as Darkness to Light programs). All other volunteers are encouraged to attend such training events. Advanced training shall be renewed at the interval recommended by the provider of the training.

Cost for the training will be paid by the church for all staff members required to take training. Cost for volunteers will be paid as the budget permits.

Cost for preschool staff training will be paid by the preschool.

## **C. CPR and First Aid**

For all events or activities for children/youth there must be at least one person trained in CPR and in Basic First Aid on the premise. CPR and Basic First aid training will be offered annually.

All paid staff who regularly work with children and youth are required to take CPR and Basic First Aid. Those who work with infants and children must be trained in children/infant CPR.

All other regular volunteers are encouraged to be trained.

Cost for the training will be paid by the church for all staff members and key volunteer positions (such as Children and Youth Coordinators, Confirmation Directors) required to take training. Cost for other volunteers will be paid as the budget permits.

Costs for preschool staff training will be paid by the preschool.

## **D. Biennial training**

Each adult volunteer or staff member who is subject to the Safe Sanctuary Policy must complete training to review the Hibben Safe Sanctuary policy and sign the Participant Covenant Statement every two years.

## **V. Reporting Suspected Abuse**

As caring Christians, we are committed to protect and advocate for children/youth participating in the life of the church. The church is entrusted to provide an emotionally safe, spiritually grounded, healthy 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 suspected abuse to stop potentially existing abuse and to prevent further abuse. 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.

**South Carolina law (S.C. Code Ann. 20-7-510) mandates that certain persons by virtue of their positions are required to report suspected child abuse or neglect to the Department of Social Services. The list of required workers includes: clergy, school teachers (this term could potentially be interpreted to include Sunday School teachers), counselors, and childcare workers in childcare centers. See the brochure on Mandatory Reporting in the church office.**

If abuse is suspected by, observed by or disclosed to a volunteer and/or paid staff member of the church, that person shall:

- A. Ensure the protection of and tend to the immediate needs of the alleged victim, as the situation requires.
- B. IMMEDIATELY notify the proper authorities by following the steps outlined below:
  1. Document the incident in writing. Written documentation is to include names, date, time, place, activity and a narrative description concerning the incident.
  2. Notify the County Office of DSS (and or police as appropriate). This is a requirement of the law. (Note: Do not attempt an investigation. This should be left to professionals who are familiar with these cases.)

Department of Social Services  
Protective Services  
3366 Rivers Avenue

North Charleston, SC 29405  
**24/7 Hotline: (843) 953-9422**

3. Notify your immediate supervisor, Children's Ministry Director, Director of the Preschool, OR the adult in charge of the event.
  4. Notify the Pastor in charge if this has not already been done. If the Pastor is the accused party, the designee will notify the chair of the Staff Parish Relations Committee and the District Superintendent.
  5. Give written documentation to the Pastor and/or Chair of the Staff Parish Committee.
- C. The Pastor or designee will notify the parents of the victim and take whatever steps are necessary to assure the safety of the child/youth until the parent(s) arrive. It is important to emphasize that the proper authorities must be notified even if the parent(s) does not wish the incident to be reported. (Note: If one or both of the parents is the alleged abuser, contact the proper authorities listed above. Follow their advice about notification of the parents.)
- D. After having reported the suspected abuse to the proper authorities, the incident is to be reported immediately by the Pastor or the Chair of SPRC to the church's attorney, the church 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, local pastor, associate member, provisional member, or diaconal minister, including all of the above who may be on leave, honorable or administrative location or retired, provisions of Paragraph 362 and Paragraph 2702 of The Book of Discipline of The United Methodist Church 2016 must be followed.
- E. A list of contact numbers for the Department of Social Services, Pastor(s), Director of Children's Ministry, and Directors of the Preschool will be available to staff and volunteers at all times.
- F. If the accused is working in a volunteer or paid position with children or youth in the church, immediately, yet with dignity and respect for the sacred worth of the person, remove the accused from further involvement with children and youth.
- G. Once the proper authorities have been contacted and the safety of the child or youth is secured, the pastor or other designated person may tell the accused that a report has been made unless advised differently by DSS. 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. This decision will be made by the Preschool Board or the Staff Parish Relations Committee.
- H. Any contact with the media should be handled by the Pastor or an authorized 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.
- I. A written report of the basic information shall be kept to ensure on-going ministry to, and advocacy for, victims and others involved. This report shall include the written documentation of the incident and the actions taken. 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 South Carolina Conference where it shall remain confidential.

## ***VI. Alternative clearance and training processes***

For church programs involving non-member volunteers, the Church Council may approve a list of organizations whose background-check and training requirements satisfy the intent of this policy. The list shall specify what documentation is to be kept on file for volunteers approved by each organization. This list might include, for example, BSA registration and Youth Protection Training for Boy Scout and Cub Scout leaders (documented by the annual unit charter listing registered leaders) or Safe Sanctuary certification by another local United Methodist church for Emergency Cold Shelter volunteers (documented by a letter from the volunteers' home church). All such volunteers are still required to read and agree to follow the procedures and guidelines in Hibben's policy while participating in activities on church property.

## ***VII. Outside Groups Using Hibben Facilities***

Any non-Hibben group which uses or rents Hibben facilities for activities which involve children, youth or vulnerable adults must:

- A. Adhere to the intent of this Safe Sanctuary Policy to insure the safety of children, youth and vulnerable adults from abuse.
- B. Provide proof of background check and approval of all adult workers with children and youth.
- C. Provide a written statement that the leaders have read the Hibben Safe Sanctuary Policy.
- D. Follow the procedure and guideline section while on Hibben's premises.
- E. Immediately report any suspected abuse that occurs on Hibben premises to the Pastor for coordination of reporting to the proper authorities.