

From General Board of Discipleship

Introduction:

The General Conference of The United Methodist Church, in April 1996, adopted a resolution aimed at reducing the risk of 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, emotional and sexual exploitation and abuse. (§ 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. Most annual conferences can cite specific incidents of child sexual abuse and exploitation within 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. Copyright © 2000 by The United Methodist Publishing House.]

Thus, in covenant with all United Methodist congregations, we adopt this policy for the prevention of child and youth abuse in our church.

Purpose:

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Our congregation's purpose for establishing this Child and Youth Abuse Prevention Policy and accompanying procedures is to demonstrate our absolute and unwavering commitment to the physical safety and spiritual growth of all our children and youth.

Statement of Covenant:

Therefore, 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 all of the workers with children and youth. We will follow reasonable safety measures in the selection and recruitment of workers; we will implement prudent operational procedures in all programs and events; we will educate all of our workers with children and youth regarding the use of all appropriate policies and methods (including first aid and methods of discipline); we will have a clearly defined procedure for reporting a suspected incident of abuse that conforms to the requirements of state law; and we will be prepared to respond to media inquiries if an incident occurs.

Conclusion:

In all of our ministries with children and youth, this congregation is committed to demonstrating the love of Jesus Christ so that each child will be "surrounded by steadfast love," established in the faith, and confirmed and strengthened in the way that leads to life eternal. (Baptismal Covenant II,. *United Methodist Hymnal*, p. 44).

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Nursery & Children's Area Protection Procedures

I. These procedures cover the activities in the Nursery and Children's area of the United Methodist Church of Vista. The Nursery is for age birth to 3 years old and the Children's area is for ages 3 years through 5th grade.

A. Drop – off and Pick up:

1. All parents, grandparents, or custodians leaving children in the nursery shall follow these procedures to assure proper claiming of children.
2. A parents, grandparents, or custodians are to complete a Church School Registration Form for their children that shall be kept on file with the Director of Children's Ministries. The form will ask for the child's name, parent, grandparent, or custodian name, home address and medical information, which should include allergies and medical conditions.
3. It is the responsibility of the parent, grandparent, or custodian to indicate to the Director of Children's Ministries if there are any custody concerns regarding the release of the child, and, if that is the case, the parent will provide a copy of the custody order.
4. The parent, grandparent, or custodian shall fill out the daily roster with their full name, the child's full name, where the parent, grandparent, or custodian will be while the child is in the nursery.
5. As we do not have a "beeper" system parents, grandparents, or custodians who feel it might be necessary for the nursery workers to get in touch with them while the child is in the nursery may leave their cell phone number with the nursery attendants. Please put cell phone on vibrate or courtesy mode.
6. The only person allowed to pick-up a child will be the parent, grandparent, or custodian who dropped off the child unless other arrangements were made when the child was dropped off. In this situation, if the person picking up the child is unknown to the nursery workers, he/she will need to show a picture identification to the workers. This will also apply to other UMC Vista programs such as (but not limited to) Parent's Night Out, Vacation Bible School, Music Camp, and programs like Kid's Klub.

B. Restrictions:

1. Only assigned workers/volunteers will be allowed in the nursery area. No other individuals will be allowed in these areas without an identified need and the approval of the Director of Children's Ministries.

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38 2. No worker/volunteer may take a child to an unsupervised area without
39 permission from the parent, grandparent or custodian.

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41 C. Providing Adequate Personnel:

42 1. On site programs that involve Nursery and Elementary age children will
43 include supervisory personnel according to the following ratios:

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45 Children Infant through 2 years of age 2: max of 4

46 3: max of 8

47 4: max of 12

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49 Children Pre-School Age 3 – 5 years 2: max of 8

50 3: max of 12

51 4: max of 16

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53 Children Kindergarten – 5th Grade 2: max of 12

54 3: max of 18

55 4: max of 24

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57 II. Rules of Behavior – Nursery and Children’s Area

58 A. *Two Unrelated Adult Rule* – A minimum of two unrelated adult teachers shall be
59 present during any children’s activity. We will strive to never have a teacher
60 working alone with any children.

61 B. *Open-door policy* – All children’s classrooms will have either a viewing window
62 that will remain free of covering or a dutch door where the top door will remain
63 open at all times. If the classroom does not have a dutch door or a viewing
64 window, the door must remain open at all times. Also if there is only one adult
65 in the room the door will remain open. The teacher / volunteers shall never be
66 in a closed-door situation with any children.

67 C. *Visible Presence* - A Sunday School coordinator or staff person will be in the
68 hallways whenever volunteer teachers are teaching children. This person will act
69 as a visible presence in support of teachers, as well as a deterrent of any
70 potentially harmful situations for children.

71 D. *Restroom Policies* – In situations where an escort is needed for a trip to the
72 restroom, a teacher will stand outside the restroom and only assist the child if
73 needed. Whenever a teacher is in the restroom with a child the door will remain
74 open. The teacher shall never be in a closed-door situation with a child. If

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75 another adult enters the restroom, the teacher will also enter the restroom and
76 keep the door open. If a child soils themselves during Sunday School, every
77 attempt will be mad to locate the parent. If a parent is unable to be located,
78 two adult volunteers will be present while cleaning up the child.

79 *E. Discipline* – Corporal punishment of any kind, is NEVER appropriate. Teachers
80 are asked to redirect a child in they should display inappropriate behavior.

81 *F. Staff* – As appropriate, a staff member will supervise ongoing programs and may
82 make unannounced visits to classrooms or other program sites.

83 **These policies cover all children’s activities while on the premises of the UMC Vista.*

84 III. Training

85 A. All staff and volunteer workers will receive training in these policies and
86 procedures in either verbal and or written form.

87 B. These policies and procedures will be made known to the congregation and to all
88 new members.

89 C. Background checks will be completed on all staff.

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Youth Area Protection Procedures

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107 These procedures cover the activities of the Youth area at the United Methodist Church of
108 Vista. Children are placed in the Youth area beginning 6th grade through the summer after 12th
109 grade.

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111 I. Supervision of Youth

112 A. Supervision Ratios of Youth and Adults:

113 1. *For safety purposes*, with high school and middle school students there will be,
114 whenever possible, one adult for every seven youth.

115 2. *For purposes of supervising youth*, an adult is defined as anyone who is at
116 least 24 years old. Anyone under the age of 24 must be screened and
117 approved by the Youth Staff before allowed to be used in a leadership
118 position.

119 B. Responsibility Times for Youth Ministry Workers:

120 1. The youth ministry assumes responsibility for supervision of youth from 15
121 minutes before a scheduled event until 15 minutes after a scheduled event.

122 2. The youth ministry is not responsible for youth at times when no youth
123 Ministry offerings are scheduled and also not responsible for youth when youth
124 are choosing not to participate in the youth ministry offerings which are
125 scheduled. Youth parents will be contacted to pick up their child if they choose
126 not to participate.

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128 II. Guidelines for Youth Counseling in Informal and/or Individual Settings

129 A. Same sex counseling is encouraged. However, ministry priorities and immediate
130 circumstances may make same sex counseling unfeasible. When occasions of other
131 than same sex counseling occur, a youth worker should seek to abide by the two adult
132 rule.

133 B. In a situation where the two adult rule is not feasible, a youth worker is expected to
134 move him/herself and the youth he/she is counseling towards the rest of the group,

135 in

136 hope of finding a second adult.

137 C. The youth ministry has an interest in helping youth and youth ministry workers
138 maintain appropriate boundaries. Youth workers need to communicate the message
139 that I am your friend, but I am not your peer clearly at all times, not only in the midst

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140 of crises, but also before any crises emerges.

141 C. *Non-parental Adults*: Youth workers under the age of 24 need to maintain the
142 distinction between leader and peers. They will not have authority over students, but
143 will be invited to lead by example. When they are in this leadership position their prior
144 relationship becomes secondary. Youth workers over the age of 24 must also be aware
145 of the distinction between leaders and peers.

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148 III. Guidelines for Youth Counseling in Formal and/or Group Settings

149 A. In Sunday School or a small group setting, the goal is to have two adults in every
150 room; if not the open door policy will be in effect.

151 B. In Youth Fellowship, the goal is to have one adult for every seven youth in
152 attendance. If possible, when dividing into small groups, we would like to have two
153 adults, per group.

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Transportation Procedures for Children/Youth Activities

The following procedures are for providing transportation for Children & Youth to and from activities sponsored and/or supervised by the United Methodist Church of Vista and affiliates. These procedures relate to transportation provided by the church, parents of youth, and youth workers to and from activities off the church property.

A. Vehicle Requirements:

1. These vehicle requirements pertain to vehicles provided by parents of participating children/youth, those provided by youth workers and any external commercial vehicles provided for transportation of children and youth.
2. All vehicles shall be in good running order, have a current valid license plate, and passenger restraints. The passenger restraints must be used while transporting children and youth.
3. All vehicles shall have insurance coverage as required by California law and specified by the church insurance policy. A copy of a current insurance card must be on file with the appropriate program director.
4. All vehicles will be multi-passenger vehicles. No motorcycles, scooters, or mopeds will be allowed. No vehicle will be allowed to carry more than the passenger capacity as specified by the vehicle manufacturer.

B. Qualification of Drivers:

1. All drivers will be workers (as qualified by the Safe Sanctuary Policies and Procedures), parents of participating youth or licensed commercial drivers. The Appropriate administrator will pre-approve all drivers.
2. All drivers will have a current valid driver's license with the classification for the vehicle being driven and be at least 25 years of age, unless he or she is a staff member of the Church, including staff summer interns (this is to accommodate summer programming and activities).

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216 3. A minimum of two unrelated adults shall supervise all groups of children and
217 youth on off-site events.

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219 C. General Rules for Transportation:

220 1. Unless otherwise approved by the administrator and the parents/guardians,
221 all transportation subject to these procedures will begin and terminate at the
222 church property.

223 2. All drivers will obey all traffic laws. Failure to do so may disqualify them
224 from driving for church related activities.

225 3. For overnight church functions, signed parent permission forms will be
226 obtained from each child or youth prior to being allowed in any of these
227 vehicles. If the youth does not have a completed permission form he/she will
228 not be permitted to participate in the transportation arranged by the church.

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230 permission forms are to be collected and checked by the group leader prior to
231 leaving the church property. Upon return to the church, the forms will
232 be provided to the appropriate administrator.

233 4. No driver is to transport any child or youth alone, without written permission
234 from the youth's parents. If possible, there will always be more than one youth
235 in the vehicle. In the event there is one child or youth in the vehicle the minor
236 must be seating in the rear seat of the vehicle. The two-adult rule does not
237 apply
238 in the parent-child relationship.

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240 V. Procedures for Children/Youth Overnight Activities

241 A. These procedures cover youth activities which require an overnight stay and are
242 sponsored and/or supervised by the United Methodist Church of Vista and affiliates.
243 This includes, but is not limited to camping, lock-ins, hotels/motels, and overnight
244 stays in a personal dwelling.

245 B. Approval - A signed parent permission form will be required of each child or youth
246 prior to the activity. These will be collected and approved by the group leader prior
247 to the activity. Following the activity, the forms will be provided to the appropriate
248 administrator.

249 C. All overnight or off church property activities require the prior permission of the
250 appropriate administrator or director.

251 D. Providing Adequate Personnel:

252 **On-site** programs that involve children and youth will include supervisory personal
253 according to the following ratios:

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255 Children 1st – 5th Grades 2: max of 24

256 3: max of 36

257 4: max of 48

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258 Youth 2: max of 14

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260 **Off-site** programs that involve children and youth will include supervisory personal
261 according to the following ratios:

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263 Children 1st – 5th Grade 2: max of 16

264 3: max of 24

265 4: max of 32, etc.

266 Youth 2: max of 28

267 3: max of 35

268 4: max of 42, etc.

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272 VI. Rules of Conduct for Children & Youth Overnight Activities

273 A. All persons are to abide by the Safe Sanctuary Policies and Procedures, including the
274 team approach for supervision.

275 B. None of the children or youth will be allowed away from the designated overnight
276 area without prior permission of the group leader and the parent's signed
277 permission.

278 C. No members of the opposite sex will be allowed to sleep in the same room
279 unsupervised.

280 D. Child or Youth covenant must be signed by the child or youth and their parents
281 before being allowed to participate in overnight activities.

282 E. Adults will not be allowed to sleep in the same bed with a child or youth unless the
283 child or youth is their child and of the same sex. (this rule allows for rare instances
284 when this is necessary on Youth ski trips or other similar events).

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286 VII. Training

287 A. All staff and volunteer workers will receive training in these policies and procedures
288 in either verbal or written form.

289 B. These policies and procedures will be made known to the congregation and all new
290 members.

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Cyber Safety and Social Media

I. Cyber Safety

- A. Have permission for children, youth, and vulnerable adults in writing for:
 - 1. Posting photos on any websites or sending e-mail or text messages or making videos.
 - 2. E-mailing, Instant Messaging, texting or sending data to a child, youth or vulnerable adult by computer, PDA, or cell phone
 - 3. The sharing of any full name or contact information.
- B. Never post easily identifiable information online.
 - 1. Use “Bcc” options in sending mass e-mails.
 - 2. Be cautious when transmitting easily identifiable information.
 - 3. Limit what is communicated in electronic prayer requests.
- C. Individual communications with children, youth, and vulnerable adults
 - 1. Conduct any communications in a professional manner.
 - 2. Save all communications with children, youth and vulnerable adults.
 - 3. If you are uneasy about any topic addressed in an e-mail or an e-mail in general, send a blind copy to a parent/guardian (if appropriate) or another trusted adult. **Honor privacy, not secrecy.**
 - 4. If abuse is divulged electronically it must be reported.
- D. Safety measures for sharing photos electronically
 - 1. Refrain from using names and never use last names or identifiable information
 - 2. Check photos for vulnerable/compromising situations and to make sure they uphold our mission.
 - 3. Check to make sure name tags are not distinguishable.
 - 4. Use low-resolution photos whenever possible and slightly blur/pixilate photos.
 - 5. Block “save photo as” options on websites (ask web master for assistance).
 - 6. Limit access to photos by employing the use of a password.
 - 7. Consider or prefer using stock or purchased photo’s/

Social Networking

Facebook, MySpace, Twitter, texting, instant messaging Social media options are growing every day. Social media offers a great opportunity to expand our mission into the online world, but it also opens a whole new can of worms --- the need to protect ourselves and our church while at the same time encouraging online interactions.

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338 To bring this into a nutshell with social media we will not be able to account for every
339 possible scenario in an online policy. We should revisit it periodically to see that we are
340 keeping up with technological advances and implementation.

341 *Remember that social media use all comes down to personal responsibility and common*
342 *sense.*

343 Social Networking Guidelines:

344 Staff or volunteers may accept youth and children as “friends” within online social
345 networking websites; however, the staff or volunteers shall not initiate those connections.
346 When this “befriending” occurs, the adult bears responsibility to maintain boundaries and
347 provide positive modeling for online communication. This should reflect the same boundaries
348 and behavior the adult would exhibit in face to face encounters.

349 A. Safety Measures for using social networking sites

- 350 1. Set privacy settings to limit who can see your profile.
- 351 2. Restrict/limit who can be your friend
- 352 3. Use higher level security features.
- 353 4. Do not post anything to your social networking site that you would not want on your
354 resume or printed in the church newsletter/bulletin.
- 355 5. Remove or do not post inappropriate comments, photos, etc.
- 356 6. Encourage youth to follow the same guidelines.

357 B. Do not give out passwords to your accounts.