

1 SAFE SANCTUARIES POLICY
2 PINSON MEMORIAL
3 UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

4 Sylvester, Georgia

5 **I. INTRODUCTION**

6 The General Conference of The United Methodist Church, in April 1996, adopted a
7 resolution aimed at reducing the risk of child sexual abuse in the church. The adopted
8 resolution includes the following statement:
9

10 "Jesus said, 'Whoever welcomes a child, welcomes *me*.' (Matthew 18:5). Children are our present
11 and our future, our hope, our teachers, our invitation- they are full participants in the life of the
12 church and in the realm of God. Jesus also said, "If any of you put a stumbling block before one of
13 these little ones... it would be better for you if a great millstone were fastened around your neck and
14 you were drowned in the depth of the sea." (Matthew 18:6). Our Christian faith calls us to offer both
15 hospitality and protection to the little ones, the children. The Social Principles of The United
16 Methodist Church state that "...children must be protected from economic, physical and sexual
17 exploitation, and abuse." Tragically, churches have not always been safe places for children. Child
18 sexual abuse, exploitation and ritual abuse (ritual abuse refers to abusive acts committed as part of
19 ceremonies or rites. Ritual abusers are often related to cults, or pretend to be.) occur in churches,
20 both large and small, urban and rural. The problem cuts across all economic, cultural and racial
21 lines. It is real, and it appears to be increasing.
22

23 "Many annual conferences can cite specific incidents of child sexual abuse and exploitation in their
24 churches. Virtually every congregation has among its members adult survivors of early sexual
25 trauma. Such incidents are devastating to all who are involved: the child, the family, the local church
26 and its leaders. Increasingly, churches are torn apart by the legal, emotional, and monetary
27 consequences of litigation following allegations of abuse.
28

29 "God calls us to make our churches safe places, protecting children and other vulnerable persons
30 from sexual and ritual abuse. God calls us to create communities of faith where children and adults
31 grow safe and strong."
32

33 (From *The Book of Resolutions of The United Methodist Church 1996*. Copyright © 1996 by The
34 United Methodist Publishing House. [pp.384-386])
35

36 Thus, in covenant with all United Methodist congregations, we adopt this policy for the
37 prevention of child abuse in our church.
38
39
40
41
42

1 **A. Purpose**

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

5
6 **B. Statement of Covenant**

7 Therefore, as a Christian community of faith and a United Methodist congregation, Pinson
8 Memorial United Methodist Church (hereafter referred to as Pinson) pledges to conduct the
9 ministry of the gospel in ways that assure the safety and spiritual growth of all of our
10 children and youth as well as all of the workers with children and youth. We will: 1) follow
11 reasonable safety measures in the selection and recruitment of workers; implement
12 prudent operational procedures in all programs and events; we will 2) educate all of our
13 workers with children and youth regarding the use of all appropriate policies and methods
14 (including first aid and methods of discipline); and we will 3)
15 have a clearly defined procedure for reporting a suspected incident of abuse that conforms
16 to the requirements of state law.

17
18 **C. Conclusion**

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

23 **II. DEFINITIONS**

24
25 **Child Abuse** is any act committed by a person in a position of trust (parent, caregiver,
26 Sunday School teacher, Pastor, or other) which harms or threatens to harm a child's
27 welfare, physical, spiritual or mental health.

28
29 We recognize child abuse may fall into four categories:

30
31 1. Physical Abuse - Inflicting bodily harm to minors constitutes physical abuse.
32 Instances of physical abuse include any physical act of undue force such as assault
33 with a knife, strap or other implement; burns, fractures and bruises resulting from
34 being beaten, pushed down, shaken, pinched, slapped or thrown. Physical abuse does
35 not always leave visible marks.

36
37 2. Sexual Abuse - Any time a minor is used for the sexual stimulation of an adult
38 or older minor, abuse has occurred. The minor is powerless either to consent to or
39 resist such sexual acts. This includes fondling, sexual intercourse, participation
40 in sexual acts, incest, exploitation for the purpose of pornography or prostitution
41 and/or exposure to adult sexual activity.

42
43 3. Emotional Abuse - Emotional abuse deeply affects a minor's self-esteem by
44 submitting him/her to verbal assault or emotional cruelty. It does not always involve

1 injuries we can see. The minor receives the message that he/she is not good and never
2 will be. Emotional abuse can include closed confinement (being shut in a small area),
3 making racial remarks, excessive punishment, use of profanity, knowingly permitting drug
4 or alcohol abuse, ignoring or encouraging peer abuse.

5
6 4. Neglect - Not hearing or addressing a minor's basic needs for health, welfare or safety
7 resulting in harm to the minor. It can include any of the following acts of negligence or
8 maltreatment:

- 9 • Failure to provide adequate food, shelter, clothing
- 10 • Abandonment
- 11 • Refusal to seek treatment for illness
- 12 • Inadequate supervision
- 13 • Health hazards in the home, school, or church
- 14 • Ignoring a minor's need for contact, affirmation, stimulation and nurture

15 **III. STANDARDS**

16 **A. Minimum Age**

17 The following standards for Authority Figures are designed to separate Authority
18 Figures from the group they are serving by age or enough years to reinforce recognition of
19 the Authority Figure's role. Pinson adopts the following standards for Authority Figures
20 and Assistants.

21 **1. AUTHORITY FIGURES**-- the primary leaders of youth and children's activities.

22 (a) To work with youth (grades 6 and above), the Authority Figure must be a
23 minimum of 21 years of age.

24 (b) To work with children (infant-5th grade), the Authority Figure must be a
25 minimum of 18 years of age.

26
27 **2. ASSISTANTS**--persons who lend aid to the Authority Figure and act at the direction of
28 the Authority Figure, including volunteers. Whether working with youth or children
29 Assistants must be:

30 (a) A minimum of 18 or 21 years of age; and

31 (b) In the judgment of a Pinson staff member, competent to assist in the activity.

32 **B. Two Adult Rule**

33 Two adults are to be present during all church sponsored programming with children and
34 youth. Where it is impossible to staff two adults in every room, an additional adult must
35 serve as a floater with visual and physical access to all areas.

36
37 While mentoring and counseling are encouraged and supported, adults and authority
38 figures should take every precaution to avoid being alone with a child or youth in
39 inaccessible areas.

40 This can include, but is not limited to:

- 41 • An automobile while taking a child home
- 42 • A classroom with windowless/locked doors

- 1 • A cabin at camp

2 **C. Rooming**

3 With parental consent, children or youth of the same sex may room together without an
4 adult. In situations where adults room with youth or children in a hotel, cabin, tent or
5 other similar situation, there must be two adults. These adults must be the same sex as the
6 children or youth.

7 **D. Six Month Rule**

8 All adult volunteer Authority Figures involved with children or youth of our church must
9 have been known to the congregation for at least six months before beginning a volunteer
10 assignment. Persons not meeting this minimum requirement may serve only as an assistant
11 with another trained adult.

12 **E. Policy Instruction**

13 All volunteers and paid staff are required to attend policy instruction before working with
14 children and youth. In the case that this is not possible, the staff person/volunteer may only
15 serve as an assistant with another trained adult and under the stipulation that they attend
16 the next training session. All volunteers and staff are required annually to review this
17 policy, to attend a policy instruction session and to sign a new participation statement kept
18 on file at the church.

19 **F. Written Record of Policy Departure**

20 A written record of any departure from this policy will be kept on file by the Church office.
21 Authority figures are expected to report these departures as quickly as possible.

22 **IV. SCREENING PROCEDURES**

23 An essential component of preventing abuse by Authority Figures, Assistants and Staff is
24 careful screening. Although we recognize the integrity of an overwhelming number of the
25 persons with discerned calling to ministries with children, youth and vulnerable persons,
26 we realize that abuse may occur in the church. Therefore, we believe that all Authority
27 Figures, Assistants and all Employees must be properly screened. It will be the
28 responsibility of the SPRC committee and the the Pastor to ensure compliance.
29

30 The following steps are used for screening volunteer and paid applicants:

31 **A. Complete an application form**

32 A completed application form will be required for Authority Figures, Assistants and all
33 employees and will be kept on file.

34 **B. Conduct an interview with applicants**

35 An interview will be conducted with all applicants. The interviewer should not ask for
36 information about marital status or handicapping conditions as stated in Federal/State
37 discrimination guidelines. The interviewer should also be sensitive to age and sex

1 discrimination guidelines; however adequate information may be requested to ensure
2 compliance with this policy's minimum standards.

3
4 The interviewer should be aware of red flags. These are indicators of issues that must be
5 explored further in order for one to be assured that all information is collected concerning
6 a prospective employee/volunteer. Red flags might include but are not limited to:

7
8 1) Many addresses over a short period of time

9 This could indicate that a person is trying to be anonymous, but it could also indicate that
10 they were a college student who moved a lot to keep rent low.

11
12 2) Wants to work with only one age group

13 If someone would like to work with only one specific age group, it could indicate that the
14 person has targeted that age group for molestation, or it could mean that is the age group
15 for which they are trained and that experience has shown that they are not as gifted with
16 other ages. Also be aware of anyone who seems overly committed to one age group. For
17 example, someone who simultaneously leads a scout troop, coaches Little League, serves as
18 a Big Brother and now wants to teach Sunday School may be neglecting their own age
19 appropriate peer relationships in order to cultivate potential victims.

20
21 3) Does not want/need/like close supervision

22 The interview may indicate that the person does not like to be closely supervised which
23 might raise questions about motivation for applying for this work. The interviewer needs
24 to be able to explore issues as they arise during the interview and to depart from the set of
25 prepared questions to do so.

26 **C. Complete Reference Checks**

27 A minimum of two references must be contacted on all applicants. It is further
28 recommended that the reference of a church official (pastor, Staff-Parish Relations
29 Chairperson (SPRC), youth director, etc.) from the church of the applicant's membership be
30 obtained.

31 **D. Complete Background Checks**

32 Pinson employs the services of LexisNexis to do all background checks, which include:

- 33 • Criminal histories
- 34 • Motor vehicle record
- 35 • Registered sexual offenders

36
37 The Background checks will be initiated and seen only by the Pastor. Concerns will be
38 reported only to the SPRC who in turn will decide how the situation will be handled.

39 **F. Federal and State Law**

40 The requirements of any and all Federal laws or State laws affecting or relating to
41 employment or child abuse must be complied with, and in any case where there is a conflict
42 between such laws and the procedure outlined in this document, said laws shall prevail and
43 the procedure outlined in the document shall be modified to the extent necessary to

1 eliminate such conflict. This policy is subject to all Federal and/or State laws relating to
2 employment and child abuse.

3 **V. REPORTING ABUSE/ALLEGED ABUSE**

4 All reports of suspected child abuse must be taken seriously. Whenever child abuse is
5 suspected, reports must immediately be made to the Pastor and the SPRC Chair. In the
6 event the victim feels uncomfortable reporting to the Pastor or if the suspected abuse
7 involves the Pastor, reports must be made to the Staff Parish Relations Chairperson (SPRC).
8

9 The SPRC may be reached by contacting the church office. If the abuse reported has taken
10 place within the church or the perpetrator is a church member or employee, the Pastor
11 and/or SPRC shall also report the suspected abuse to the District Superintendent.
12

13 Under no circumstances shall the person reporting the suspected incident contact any
14 representative of any news reporting agency. Such a report, when made, would be made
15 only after consultation with the District Superintendent, and by the appropriate Public
16 Relations officer of the South Georgia Annual Conference.

17 **VI. INVESTIGATION**

18 Whenever child abuse is suspected, the following information should be obtained and
19 reported to the Pastor and/or Staff Parish Relations Committee Chairperson:

- 20 • Names, ages, addresses and telephone numbers of both the accused and the abused
 - 21 • The nature of the alleged abuse, with dates where possible
 - 22 • The factual details of the report
 - 23 • The name of the person making the report and the date that the information was
24 received.
- 25

26 The Pastor and/or SPRC shall conduct or direct an investigation into the suspected abuse in
27 conjunction with the Safe Sanctuaries Committee. Interim measures may be taken during
28 the investigation to safeguard the potential victim or victims. At the conclusion of the
29 investigation, appropriate actions shall be taken. Depending upon the findings, this may
30 include termination of employment.

31 **VII. SAFE SANCTUARIES COMMITTEE**

32 The Staff-Parish Relations Committee shall function as the review authority for matters
33 relating to this policy.
34