

Summary of Purpose and Requirements for Safe Sanctuary Policy

The General Conference of The United Methodist Church, in April 1996, adopted a resolution aimed at reducing the risk of child 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” (paragraph 162C)¹

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] have occurred in churches, large and small, urban and rural. The problems cut across all economic and 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.

Purpose of Safe Sanctuary Policy

¹ The Book of Resolutions of The United Methodist Church – 2000 (Nashville: The United Methodist Publishing House, 2000), 180f.#

The purpose and intent of the Safe Sanctuary/Child & Youth Protection Policy of Holman United Methodist Church will be to provide a safe and secure environment to teach and care for the children and youth of our congregation. We are equally committed to the physical safety and the spiritual growth of the young people in our care.

Our goal is to protect children, youth and vulnerable adults from physical, emotional or sexual abuse, and from neglect by staff or volunteers of Holman United Methodist Church. We also aim to protect the staff and volunteers from false accusations of abuse.

Some Ministries that Call for Application of Safe Sanctuary Policy

- *Camp*
- *Rehearsals for choirs, dance teams, special programs, etc.*
- *Children/Youth Church School*
- *Junior Ushers meetings/trainings*
- *Nursery*
- *Vacation Bible School*
- *Confirmation*
- *Field Trips*
- *Church Functions at which childcare is provided*
- *Community Partners (A-MAN, Holman CDC, SCHARP, Freedom School)*
- *Others as needed*

A Few Basic Requirements

- **Background checks** - all of our church staff and volunteers who minister with children/youth will undergo background checks
- **Sign In/Out** - All children & youth must be signed in/out when not in parent care
- **Two Adult Rule** – provides for better teaching by sharing responsibility, adds a second watchful person to provide safe care and helps in the positive management of disruptive children.
- **“Five Years Older” Rule** - Workers with youth should be at least five years older than the youth participants.
- **Safe Sanctuary training required** for all volunteers to cover how to prevent and report child abuse.
- **First Aid/CPR Training provided** for all volunteers serving with young people.
- **Counseling for Youth** is open door and non-isolated
- **Social Networking Guidelines**