

Cokesbury United Methodist Church

Safe Sanctuary Policy: For Children, Youth and Vulnerable Adults

Revised October 11, 2020 --- Adopted by Church Council 11/24/2019
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Mission Statement

This Safe Sanctuary Policy is written to ensure that Cokesbury United Methodist Church provides a caring and secure environment for activities of church life. The Cokesbury community of faith models the love of God for the children/youth/vulnerable adults in many ways that include taking time to listen to one another, and providing a safe nurturing environment for all who attend while modeling healthy and positive behaviors.

Purpose

Our congregation's purpose for establishing our Safe Sanctuary Policy is to demonstrate our commitment to the physical, emotional safety, and spiritual growth of all our members, guests and employees. Therefore, as a Christian community of faith, we will mandate and implement prudent operational procedures to respond to observed, suspected or reported incidents of abuse or neglect. We will have a clearly defined procedure for reporting all suspected incidents of abuse or neglect.

Introduction

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 tells us to offer both hospitality and protection to all children, youths and vulnerable adults and protect them from economic, physical and sexual exploitation, and abuse.

Such incidents are devastating to all who are involved: the child, the youth, the vulnerable adult, 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 as safe as possible, protecting children, youth, and other vulnerable adults from abuse. God calls us to create communities of faith where children and adults grow safe and strong. In response to this church-wide challenge Cokesbury United Methodist Church has in place, a Safe Sanctuary Policy in order to help reduce the risk of all forms of abuse.

1. Guidelines

In order to help provide a safe and healthy environment, Cokesbury United Methodist Church requires all employees and regular scheduled volunteers working with children, youth, and vulnerable adults to comply with this Safe Sanctuary Policy.. In doing so, those individuals will be asked to comply with the church's screening procedures and to review this document as part of their orientation and training. All employees and regular scheduled volunteers from outside organizations who use Cokesbury United Methodist Church space are required to adhere to the guidelines outlined in this policy.

2. Safe Sanctuary Committee

Safe Sanctuary Committee (SSC) will be composed of 5 members (Pastor, Lay Leader, Safe Sanctuary Committee Chair or Co-Chair, Nursery Coordinator, and Church Council Representative. The Nomination Committee will oversee membership for the said committee. Duration of term on the SSC will be 3 years. There will be staggered tenure, so that one member will be replaced each year. SSC records will be stored in a locked safe in the main office accessible only by the chair of the Safe Sanctuary Committee and the Cokesbury United Methodist Church Pastor.

3. Screening

In an effort to create the safest possible environment within Cokesbury United Methodist Church, several abuse prevention and proactive procedures will be employed. These include criminal history report on the local, state, and national levels, of paid and regular scheduled volunteer workers, child and adult abuse training, use of the two leader rule, standards of appropriate classroom discipline, safety checks by church staff, and open classroom doors during occupancy.

4. Background Requirements for Employees and Regularly Scheduled Volunteers

Applicants for full-time, part-time paid employment or as a regularly scheduled volunteer at Cokesbury United Methodist Church will be required to provide, complete or undergo the following:

Successful completion of a background check that includes a specific statement that the individual has no prior conviction for child or adult abuse or sexual misconduct; and references checks covering the last five years. Additionally where possible, references from two immediate past employers should be obtained, or personal references unrelated to the applicant if no information can be obtained from past employers.

Cokesbury United Methodist Church will pay to have a local, state, and national criminal database search and national sex offender registry search on existing employees and regularly scheduled volunteers, and each individual shall be required to execute any documents that Cokesbury United Methodist Church might request for such purpose.

Before beginning work, each individual will be required to sign an acknowledgement that he or she has received a copy of the Cokesbury United Methodist Church Safe Sanctuary Policy understands it and will comply with its terms.

Any individual who has a past conviction of or pending allegation of child, youth or adult abuse/neglect cannot be scheduled as a volunteer by Cokesbury United Methodist Church.

Leaders of other groups of children or youth (e.g., Girl Scout and Boy Scout leaders) who

use Cokesbury United Methodist Church facilities will also be required to read the Safe Sanctuary Policy and sign the Volunteer Acknowledgement Statement.

5. Categories of Regularly Scheduled Volunteers, Employees and Workers

Adult Leader or Volunteer: Someone who is over 18 years of age and affiliated with Cokesbury United Methodist Church. An individual who is not compensated for services contributed to Cokesbury United Methodist Church.

Youth Leader or Regularly Scheduled Volunteer: Someone over 18 years old and is 4 years senior to the oldest child and an individual who is not compensated for services contributed to Cokesbury United Methodist Church.

Employee: An individual who is hired by Cokesbury United Methodist Church to provide services as described in their job description.

Family Unit: Two or more individuals who are connected by marriage or by family of origin, e.g. husband, wife, sibling, child.

Contract Workers: Contract Workers includes individuals under contract by Cokesbury United Methodist Church to provide services, e.g. a cleaning crew. The company shall be provided with the Safe Sanctuary Policy and the company's representative signs a formal acknowledgement of compliance with these rules and guidelines.

6. Definitions

Two Leader Rule: If any group has an overnight event, whether at Cokesbury United Methodist Church or elsewhere, two or more leaders must be present and must include at least one male and one female (not from the same household) if the group is mixed gender. At least two adults will be present when interacting with children, youth, and vulnerable adults. The interaction will take place in a publicly open area, as defined by the Open Door Rule.

A Child is from newborn to 10 years old. A youth is from 11 years to 18 years old.

Vulnerable Adult: A person 18 years or older who has a diagnosed condition that resulted in a disabling injury. The conditions are: **1)** A learning or physical disability; **2)** A physical or mental illness, chronic or otherwise, including an addiction to alcohol or drugs; or **3)** A reduction in physical or mental capacity. The disabilities are: **1)** A dependency upon others in the performance of, or a requirement for assistance in the performance of, basic physical functions; **2)** Severe impairment in the ability to communicate with others; or **3)** Impairment in a person's ability to protect him or herself from assault, abuse or neglect.

Open Door Rule: Classroom doors with an unobstructed window are preferred. These windows are to be uncovered at all times. If there is no window, the door is to remain open throughout the activity or class.

Safe Sanctuary Policy Committee members shall make random visits to all classrooms or other areas where there are children. Members of the Committee will sign the log confirming checks of classrooms.

The log shall be affixed to the door inside of the classroom.

First Aid Kit: A first aid kit will be located inside the classroom. Nursery personnel, paid childcare workers and teachers are strongly encouraged to take First Aid and CPR training. The cost for pediatric first aid and CPR ranges from \$90 to \$300 depending upon location of training site.

Suspicion: Act or an instance of suspecting something wrong without definite proof. Upon

discovery of a suspicious act, the incident shall be reported immediately to the pastor and a representative of the Safe Sanctuary Committee.

7. Safe Sanctuary Policy Guidelines and Procedures

It is required that workers, employees, or regularly scheduled volunteers will not be alone with a church participant such as a child, youth or vulnerable adult. (See Two Adult Rules).

Regularly scheduled volunteers and employees must read the Safe Sanctuary Policy and agree to it by completing and signing the policy and submitting to the Nursery Coordinator

All church regularly scheduled volunteers working with church participants must be a member of or be a regular attendee at Cokesbury United Methodist Church for a period of at least six months prior to beginning in any such volunteer position. If the volunteer has less than six months then the person will be partnered with a fully qualified Cokesbury United Methodist Church regularly scheduled volunteer or employee. Exceptions to this rule must be approved by the Safe Sanctuary Committee.

In accordance with the Safe Sanctuary Policy employees and regularly scheduled volunteers should immediately report suspicious or inappropriate behavior that suggests **1)** sexual abuse or exploitation, **2)** neglect, **3)** physical abuse, or **4)** emotional abuse, to law enforcement or child/adult protective services, and then fill out the Incident Report Form. Copies of this form will be located in the Church Administrative Office. The completed form should be given to the Pastor.

If an incident has occurred on Cokesbury United Methodist Church property or during a church-sponsored event, the parents of any minor involved in any allegation of abuse shall be notified immediately by the pastor. The parental notification shall be documented by the pastor and passed to the Chair of the Safe Sanctuary Committee.

8. Additional Guidelines and Procedures

For off-site activities when church participants and /or regularly scheduled volunteers are participating in a Cokesbury United Methodist Church sponsored event, any suspicious incident, behavior or victim disclosure shall be treated no differently than if it occurred on Cokesbury United Methodist Church property.

9. Overnights

Males and females must be segregated during sleeping time as shall the adult chaperones. If it is deemed necessary for adults to share sleeping accommodations with the children, a minimum of two adults of the same sex shall be present at all times in the sleeping area.

Husband and wife volunteer teams are not allowed to be alone with a child unless they abide by the Open-Door Policy. All volunteers and staff persons who drive and/or chaperone on off-site trips involving children are expected to conform to all aspects of the Safe Sanctuary Policy.

10. Cokesbury United Methodist Church Employees & Regularly Scheduled Volunteers

It shall be the responsibility of the Safe Sanctuary Committee to see that each newly hired employee or volunteer is given a copy of this policy. An obligation to comply with and enforce the Safe Sanctuary Policy shall be inherent in accepting employment or volunteer service at Cokesbury United Methodist Church.

11. Care of Documents

All information shall be treated in a confidential manner. Except in the case of a response to a report of suspicious activity, only the Cokesbury United Methodist Church Council Chair, Safe Sanctuary Committee Chair and the Cokesbury United Methodist Church Pastor including the appropriate legal counsel, shall have access to the information with regard to these documents. All documents associated with a neglect/abuse incident shall be kept in secure storage with access restricted to the authorized personnel.

12. Definitions of Child Abuse/Neglect

Physical Abuse is physical injury (ranging from minor bruises to severe fractures or death) as a result of punching, beating, kicking, biting, shaking, throwing, stabbing, choking, hitting (with a hand, stick, strap, or other object), burning, or otherwise harming a child or vulnerable adult. Such injury is considered abuse regardless of whether the caretaker intended to hurt the child.

Sexual Abuse includes activities by a parent or caretaker such as fondling a child's or vulnerable adult's genitals, penetration, incest, rape, sodomy, indecent exposure, and exploitation through prostitution or the production of pornographic materials.

Emotional Abuse is a pattern of behavior that impairs a child's or vulnerable adult's emotional development or sense of self-worth. This may include constant criticism, threats, or rejection, as well as withholding love, support, or guidance. Emotional abuse is often difficult to prove and therefore, Child and Adult Protective Services may not be able to intervene without evidence of harm to the child. Emotional abuse is almost always present when other forms are identified.

13. Reporting and Responding to Suspicious or Inappropriate Activity & Disclosure

Any suspicion of inappropriate activity or personal disclosure of inappropriate activity with children, youth or vulnerable adults shall be brought immediately to the attention of law enforcement, Child Adult Protective Services, and Pastor without delay.

The pastor should extend whatever care and resources are necessary to those impacted by the allegation, but under no circumstances should the pastor, church leader or church member investigate the allegation. In providing care to the principals (alleged victim and the accused) and their families, the pastor or church leader, should under no circumstances be drawn into a discussion of the truth or falsity of the allegation which could contaminate the investigation. Do not assign blame or take any steps that involve establishing or refuting the allegation.

Emergency Contact - Virginia Child and Adult Protective Services Hotline: 1-800-552-7096.

Prince William County Police Emergency 9-1-1 and Non-Emergency: 703-792-7200

We shall report all suspected abuse/neglect immediately to the police department and Child Protective Services for the safety of the alleged victim(s) as stated in Virginia State Code Sections 63.1-248.2 and 63.1-248.3.

The person receiving the personal disclosure shall document the date, time, and circumstances of the alleged incident on the attached Incident Report Form and proceed to remove one's self from the responding process.

Cokesbury UMC shall comply with all state laws and the legal investigation of the reported incident to avoid compromising, interfering with or delay this legal process. The allegations will be reported to the Church insurance carrier following notification of legal authorities and Church officials. If a reported incident is unfounded the Safe Sanctuary Committee, and the Cokesbury

United Methodist Church Pastor and other designated council have the option to recommend appropriate action, which may include a review of the processes in that program and/or further education.

14. The Safe Sanctuary Committee

Listed below are the names and contact information of the 2019 Safe Sanctuary Committee.

Pastor, Taylor Mertins # 703-494-5400

SSC Chair, Leo G. Bonner , # 703-973-8259

SSC Co-Chair, Crystal Karim, #571-552-0673

Nursery Coordinator, Melanie Blair, # 571-264-7978

Church Council Representative, Walter Blair, #703-878-7433

15. Responsibility for the implementation of the Safe Sanctuary Policy

The Church Council will ensure that the provisions of this policy are reviewed annually..

Appendix A

Application Form Please complete the following to indicate your interest in working with children and youth:

In which ministry area are you interested in volunteering?

_____ Children's Ministries: Newborn to 5th grade (Nursery)

_____ Youth Ministries: 6th grade through 12th grade

_____ Children's Music: 5 years old through 5th grade

_____ Youth Music: 6th grade through 12th grade

Have you volunteered with children, youth or adults at before? _____ Yes _____ No

If Yes, in what capacity and when did you volunteer? _____

I have completed the regularly scheduled volunteer application form in the past 3 years.

Initial _____, Date completed: _____

I have read and understand the Cokesbury United Methodist Church Safe Sanctuary Policy.

I verify that all the information I provided on the regularly scheduled volunteer application form is still correct and truthful. Since the completion of my application form dated above, I certify that there have been no changes to my criminal background check that would prohibit me from regularly scheduled volunteer work with church participants.

Name

Date

Appendix B

Mission Groups, organizations, or other outside groups using the facilities of Cokesbury United Methodist Church

I have read, and I understand the Cokesbury United Methodist Church Safe Sanctuary Policy. I acknowledge that I am the party responsible for this group's behavior. I agree to ensure that all people in my group will act in accordance with the Safe Sanctuary Policy.

Signature

Date

Appendix C

AUTHORIZATION AND RELEASE

FOR THE PROCUREMENT OF A NATIONAL RECORDS CHECK

In keeping with the Cokesbury United Methodist Church Safe Sanctuary Policy, any staff member or volunteer 18 years of age or older will complete the necessary forms to complete a national records check and to permit transmittal of the official written results of this check directly to Cokesbury United Methodist Church.

A copy of a national records check completed within the last 2 years may be submitted to Cokesbury United Methodist Church in lieu of completion of a new background check. This report must be submitted with application forms.

I, the undersigned, do hereby authorize **Cokesbury United Methodist Church**, by and through its identified current independent contractor, to procure a national records investigative report on me.

These above-mentioned reports may include, but are not limited to, information as to my social security number verification, present and former addresses verification and criminal history/records.

I understand that I am entitled to a complete and accurate disclosure of the nature and scope of any investigative report of which I am the subject upon my written request to **Cokesbury United Methodist Church**, if such is made within a reasonable time after the date hereof.

I further authorize any governmental agency that may have information relevant to the above to disclose the same to **Cokesbury United Methodist Church**.

I hereby release **Cokesbury United Methodist Church, and its current independent contractor responsible for conducting background checks** and

all persons, business entities and governmental agencies, whether public or private, from any and all liability, claims and/or demands, by me, my heirs or others making such claim or demand on my behalf, for providing an investigative report hereby authorized. I understand that this Authorization/Release form shall remain in effect for the duration of my service with Cokesbury United Methodist Church.

Further, I certify that the information contained on this Authorization/Release form is true and correct and that my application or service will be terminated based on any false, omitted or fraudulent information.

I give consent to check only those I have initialed.

1. Criminal record check _____
2. Motor vehicle record check _____
3. Sex Offender Registry check _____
4. VA Department of Social Services/CPS _____
5. Screening One Services _____
6. Credit Bureau check _____

Primary Screening Form for Workers with Safe Sanctuary Policy

Cokesbury United Methodist Church

14806 Blackburn Road, Woodbridge, Virginia 22191

Full Name (including maiden name):

Present Address:

City: _____, State: _____, Zip Code: _____

Previous Address if less than 5 years at current address:

Home Phone: _____ Work Phone: _____ Cell Phone: _____

Date first active at Cokesbury UMC: _____

Name of church or churches you have attended regularly during the past five years:

Have you worked with children or youth before (paid or unpaid)? _____ if
so, list
on back of this page all previous church and non-church experiences (provide names, dates and
addresses).

Current driver's license number:

Have you ever been convicted of a crime? _____ if yes, explain:

References (no close relatives please):

Name _____ Relationship _____ Telephone _____

Name _____ Relationship _____ Telephone _____

I have read and understand the Cokesbury United Methodist Church Safe Sanctuary Policy and agree to abide by it. I have no convictions for child abuse or expungements of such violations. I authorize any person or church listed above to give you information (including options) that they may have regarding my character and fitness to work with children or youth and I hereby release any such person or church from any and all liability for damages of whatever kind that may result as a result of any compliance or attempt to comply with this authorization.

Signature: _____ Date: _____

For Official Use Only:

Approved _____

Comments _____

Appendix D

Incident Report Form / Confidential

Name of staff/ regularly scheduled volunteer/congregational member observing or receiving disclosure of alleged abuse, neglect or other applicable terms associated with this Policy:

Date/time of report: _____

Victim's name: _____ Victim's age or date of birth: _____

Date and place of abuse, neglect: _____

Alleged victims or witness statement (give your detailed summary here or on back of this page and please include dates of alleged event(s), if known): _____

Name of person accused of abuse/neglect: _____

Relationship of accused to victim [e.g., paid staff, volunteer, family member, other (please specify)]: _____

Reported to: Pastor, or Safe Sanctuary

Committee Representative (give name): _____

Summary of report: _____

Date/time notification made to law enforcement: _____

Date/time notification made to Virginia Department of Social Services: _____

Summary of conversation:
