

Safe Sanctuary Policy for All Conference and District Events

Texas Annual Conference

Effective June 1, 2005 – Adopted June 2, 2004

Introduction to Conference Policy

OUR CALLING AND OUR MANDATE IS TO ENSURE SAFE SANCTUARY FOR GOD'S PEOPLE

Throughout the gospels, Jesus provides teachings on providing a peaceable kingdom for all of God's people, including our most precious gifts, our children and youth (Matthew 5:9, Luke 18:15-17). The peaceable kingdom begins with sanctuary.

Scriptures provide examples of how sanctuary is to be a community of protective nurture and harmony (Psalms 20:1-2, 27:4-5). As Christians, we are called to create a safe sanctuary in our churches. They must be holy, safe, and protective communities for all of God's children, regardless of age or ability. The purpose of this policy is to address the safety of our children and youth at all local churches, and at District or Annual Conference sponsored events. The Texas Annual Conference of the United Methodist Church recognizes the need to have a formal, written policy with procedures in place (1) to help prevent the opportunity for the occurrence and/or the appearance of abuse of children and youth and (2) to help protect workers from false accusations and/or suspicions.

The following policy and procedures are not based on a lack of trust in workers, but are intended to protect our preschoolers, children, youth, workers, employees, volunteers and the entire church body. Careful and confidential documentation is essential to show compliance with policies, to verify information as needed, and to have an accurate record in the case of an incident.

Scope of Conference Policy

This policy and its provisions shall apply to all persons including all paid and unpaid leaders, whether lay or clergy who have any direct or indirect contact with children and youth who participate in any activities or events sponsored by the Texas Conference and/or its Districts. Further, each local church is required to adopt a Safe Sanctuary policy for their church by December 31, 2005 and submit the policy to the Area Provost. This Conference policy is effective as of June 1, 2005 for all Conference and District events.

The Texas Conference policy shall be applicable at all Conference and District activities involving children and youth. Examples include, but are not limited to the following: Summer District Camps, District/Conference Trips, District Confirmation Retreats, Mid-Winter/Carnival/Fest, District and Conference Youth Leadership Meetings, Choir Clinic, and School of Christian Missions. The following examples may help distinguish between the application of the Conference policy: a local congregation family camp at Lakeview involves the local congregation's policy, whereas a District or Conference family camp at Lakeview involves the Conference policy.

Definition of Childcare Provider, Assistant Leader, and Leader at Conference and District Events

- *Childcare provider is someone that is eighteen (18) years of age or older with a high school diploma or equivalent.*
- *Assistant Leader is someone 18-20 years of age with a high school diploma or equivalent, who is supervised by a leader.*
- *Leader is someone who is twenty-one (21) years of age or older.*

Supervision

To achieve compliance with the Safe Sanctuary policy it may be necessary to combine groups; recruit, train, and reference additional volunteers; or cancel an event. *Recognizing that there is safety in numbers, children and youth will be instructed to use the “buddy system.” It is also strongly encouraged that there be present at least one leader who is trained and certified in First Aid and CPR at all Conference and District events.*

Supervision for Nursery/childcare at Conference and District events:

- *There shall be a minimum of two (2) childcare providers per room.*
- *We recommend that whenever possible State Childcare Minimum Standards shall be followed, particularly in relation to the number of childcare providers to child ratio.*

Supervision of children and youth at Conference and District events:

- *Conference and District events shall observe the “2 Leader Rule” (2 leaders per classroom, 2 leaders within line of sight when outdoors.)*
- *Exception to allow 1 leader/1 assistant may be made with the approval of the event leader on a case-by-case basis.*
- *Any one-to-one mentoring or consulting shall be conducted in sight of another leader.*
- *Understanding that there is safety in numbers, one leader can be in contact with multiple youth (6th-12th grade) so long as they are in line of sight of other leaders.*

Overnight Accommodations

At events that require overnight accommodations:

- *We strongly recommend that at least (2) leaders be present in every room.*
- *When staying in a hotel, leaders shall sleep in separate rooms from children/youth; or if necessary for children/youth to share a room with a leader, leaders shall sleep in separate beds from children/youth so long as any one leader shall not be alone with any one child/youth.*
- *Recognizing accommodations may be restrictive in some cases (example: Windham at Lakeview), one leader is adequate, so long as any one leader shall NOT be alone with any one-child/youth.*

Definitions of Abuse

1. **Verbal Abuse-** Any verbal act that humiliates, degrades or threatens any child or youth.
2. **Physical Abuse –** Any act of omission or an act that endangers a person’s physical or mental health. In the case of child or youth physical abuse, this definition includes any intentional physical injury caused by the individual’s caretaker. Physical abuse may result from punishment that is overly punitive or inappropriate to the individual’s age or condition. In addition, physical abuse may result from purposeful acts that pose serious danger to physical health of a child or youth.
3. **Sexual Abuse –** Child or youth sexual abuse is the sexual exploitation or use of same for satisfaction of sexual drives. This includes, but is not limited to: 1) incest, 2) rape, 3) prostitution, 4) romantic involvement with any participant, 5) any sexual intercourse, or sexual conduct with, or fondling of an individual enrolled as a child or youth in Conference or District sponsored activities, 6) sexualized behavior that communicates sexual interest and/or content. Examples are not limited to: displaying sexually suggestive visual materials, making sexual comments or innuendo about one’s own or another person’s body, touching another person’s body, hair or clothing, touching or rubbing oneself in the presence of another person, kissing, and sexual intercourse. (#6 taken from Resolution #30 *Book of Resolutions 2000*).

Screening for Leaders, Assistant Leaders, and Childcare providers

Careful screening is one way to prevent the abuse of children and youth. Screening calls for a careful gathering and review of information in search of those who can provide safe and caring supervision in a safe environment.

1. *Prior to employment or acceptance as a leader, assistant leader or childcare provider (paid or unpaid), the event leader in charge of an event or program shall direct each prospective applicant to complete the application/consent form. By signing the form, the applicant gives permission to the event leader, local congregation and/or Conference Safe Sanctuary Certification Authority to contact references and perform the necessary investigation to complete the review of the application.*
2. ***The local congregation is responsible for conducting references and screening.*** This may be done through the local church, District office, or the Conference Safe Sanctuary Certification Authority. All screening shall be done in accordance with guidelines to be established by the Conference Safe Sanctuary Certification Authority.
3. The Conference Safe Sanctuary Certification Authority shall receive the completed forms and reports from the local congregation and/or event leader and review them. If any of the reports raise questions about fitness of the applicant, the Conference Safe Sanctuary Certification Authority should disapprove the application and notify the event leader and/or local church. The Texas Conference reserves the right to turn away any persons for service.
4. *If the applicant (paid or unpaid) is found to have been involved in any activity in which the applicant abused or exploited children or youth, the applicant will not be approved. Any conviction of a crime against children or youth shall disqualify any applicant.*
5. Results of screens shall be kept confidential. *The determination of whether a particular crime is serious enough to result in the Texas Conference giving a negative recommendation shall be made by the Texas Conference in its sole discretion. Without in any way limiting those crimes which the Texas Conference may determine to be serious, the Texas Conference offers the following examples as guidelines:*

Persons having a criminal history of any of the following types of offenses shall not be allowed to serve in any ministry with children and youth:

- *Child abuse, whether physical, emotional, sexual, or neglectful*
- *Violent offenses, including murder, rape, assault, domestic violence, etc*
- *Persons having a Criminal History of DUI or DWI conviction within the five (5) years immediately prior to application shall not be allowed to act as a driver.*
- *Persons having a Criminal History of a drug related conviction within the five (5) years immediately prior to application shall not be allowed to participate in the event.*

Training

The Texas Conference of the United Methodist Church shall, through its Districts, develop and implement training and orientation procedures for all persons in leadership who work with children and youth at Conference or District activities and events. Training shall include but is not limited to appropriate discipline, appropriate physical and emotional boundaries, leader misconduct, and this policy. No person shall, after June 1, 2005, have any direct or indirect contact with children and/or youth until they have completed this training program. We recommend that at the beginning of each event a review of this policy be conducted.

The Conference Safe Sanctuary Certification Authority – will consist of four persons: a member of the Cabinet, the Director of Spiritual Formation and Teaching Ministries, the Area Provost and the Conference Safe Sanctuary Staff Person.

The guidelines of these policies and procedures create a status of Safe Sanctuary Certification with the Texas Conference. Leaders thus certified are entrusted with the title “Certified Safe Sanctuary Worker with Children and Youth.”

Reporting of Incidents

1. *When a leader of a Conference or District program, event or activity suspects that abuse or any suspected violation of the Texas Penal Code is taking or has taken place, he or she shall call 911 when needed and report the abuse to the appropriate local law enforcement agency and/or the Department of Protective and Regulatory Services (800-252-5400). The leader shall contact the administrator or event leader immediately, and cooperate fully with the investigation conducted by law enforcement officials or child protective services.*
2. *Address any needs the child or youth may have, medical or otherwise. Report to the parent(s) and/or legal guardians(s).*
3. *The person suspected of abuse (respondent) shall, for the safety and well being of the children or youth, be removed with dignity from further contact with the children and youth until an appropriate investigation has taken place. The matter shall remain confidential. If the event leader is the respondent, then the report should be made to that person’s Conference supervisor.*
4. *Following the report of an incident, the event leader, or supervisor in charge shall document the report, and then speak with the alleged victim, being careful to use open-ended questions.*
5. *All such conversations shall be documented. Careful and confidential documentation is essential. The documentation should include the following:*
 - a. *The name of the leader observing or receiving the disclosure of abuse, including the date, time and place and any action taken by this person.*
 - b. *The alleged victim’s name, age, and date of birth.*
 - c. *Any statement made by the alleged victim.*
 - d. *Name of the respondent, the date, time and place of any conversation or any statement made by the respondent.*
 - e. *Any action taken, i.e. suspension of the respondent.*
 - f. *Date and time of call to the appropriate agency, name of worker spoken to, content of that conversation and case number assigned.*
 - g. *Date and time of call to law enforcement agency, name of officer spoken to and content of that conversation.*
 - h. *Date and time of any other contacts made regarding this incident.*
6. ***Notify the Conference/District authorities.***
7. *It shall be the goal to provide supportive care to both the victim and the respondent and to restore such persons to wholeness. Supportive care can include the procedures of the criminal justice system, provisions of the current *Book of Discipline*, appropriate counseling referrals and continued pastoral visitation.*
8. *Confirmed reports of proven incidents of abuse shall be retained in a confidential Texas Conference Safe Sanctuary Certification Authority file for future screening purposes.*

Media Response

The Bishop shall be informed of all investigations or allegations of abuse. If investigations or allegations of abuse should come to the attention of the media, a response shall come from a spokesperson in the Conference Communications Office or as designated by the Bishop. Refer all inquires to the spokesperson. Do not give out any information, simply state that all inquiries will be answered by our spokesperson.

Appropriate Discipline

Children and youth should be made aware that appropriate behavior is expected at all events. Gentle reminders are always necessary when dealing with children and youth. When these reminders don't work, then discipline needs to move to the next step. In cases where behavior has to be addressed, designated event adults should handle it. In no case is physical discipline an appropriate measure to deal with problems. A reasonable response might include a period of "time out" for the child or youth. This should be done with necessary supervision keeping safe sanctuary guidelines in mind.

Keeping parents involved is important. They need to be kept up to date on their child's behavior. For serious offenses, the appropriate response will be to send the child or youth home immediately. Parents and the leaders will help make proper arrangements.

Appropriate Physical and Emotional Boundaries

Physical boundaries are most important in dealing with children and youth. Persons working with children and youth have to understand and respect those boundaries. Obviously these boundaries change as children grow older. A young child sitting in the lap of a caregiver is most appropriate, whereas an older child or youth sitting in an adult's lap would not be acceptable. Hugs and kisses from a toddler to an adult are entirely different than the same from a youth.

Emotional boundaries are also important. As a child grows older it is important for the adult to maintain appropriate boundaries in relationships. It is important for those working with children and youth to not step outside of those lines and allow the younger person to become too attached to them. It is important for the older person to be careful where conversations might lead and to steer clear of inappropriate talk. When an adult recognizes that there might be an issue with these boundaries, great space should be allowed to come between them and the child or youth in question. If that does not solve the problem, then the event leadership should address the issue.

Leader Misconduct

It is a privilege to work with youth. Great responsibility is required. Those who violate this policy shall immediately be removed from contact with children and youth and appropriate authorities shall be notified immediately.

Spiritual Boundaries for Safe Sanctuary

As we seek to lead young people in the development of their faith story, it is essential that we guide them and do not manipulate their emotions. This is especially true at longer youth/children's events. The attendees may be exhausted by longer and more active days than they are accustomed to and thereby more susceptible to emotional manipulation. It is therefore necessary that, as we present the message of the Gospel of Jesus Christ and the opportunity to follow Jesus in a life-long journey, we present the invitation with "no-strings-attached." We must allow each person involved to make their own decisions without stigma, coercion, or pressure in any form. As we do this faithfully, we will see more fruitful commitments in the lives of all our participants.