

7 SAFE SANCTUARY

In April 1996, the General Conference of The United Methodist Church adopted a resolution aimed at reducing the risk of child sexual abuse in the church. It is in response to this resolution that Community United Methodist Church developed a Safe Sanctuary Policy. God calls us to make our churches communities of faith where children and adults alike can grow strong and remain safe. As Jesus said, “Whoever welcomes a child...welcomes me.”

7.1 Policy

Community United Methodist Church is committed to providing a safe and secure environment for all children, youth, and volunteers who participate in ministries and activities sponsored by the church. We consider our children and youth to be our most precious gifts. Our congregation is committed to preserving this church as a holy place of safety and protection for all who would enter, and as a place in which all people can experience the love of God through relationships with others. The following statements reflect this commitment and apply to all volunteers who seek to work with the children or youth of our congregation:

1. Any adult who has been convicted of child abuse (whether sexual, physical, or emotional abuse) may not work in any capacity with children or youth in any church-sponsored activity or ministry.
2. Any adult survivor of child abuse who desires to volunteer in some capacity to work with children or youth is asked to confidentially discuss his/her experience with one of our church’s ministers before accepting an assignment. Adult survivors of child abuse need the love and support of our congregation.
3. Adult volunteers assuming a primary role of leadership and responsibility in children’s or youth activities shall have been active participants of the congregation for at least six months immediately prior to beginning a volunteer assignment. Examples include youth counselors, chaperones for youth activities both on-site and off-site, team leaders on youth mission trips, etc.
4. Adult volunteers shall observe the “Two-Adult Rule” at all times so that no adult is ever alone with children or youth. At least two adults must be present at any church-sponsored event or ministry involving children or youth. No exceptions. This is for the safety of the volunteers as well as the children and youth.
5. Adult volunteers shall attend regular training and educational events provided by the church to keep volunteers informed of church policies and state laws regarding child abuse.
6. Adult volunteers shall immediately report to their supervisor any behavior that seems abusive or inappropriate.
7. Volunteers under the age of 18 shall not be in a primary role of responsibility for the supervision of CUMC’s children or youth.

Community United Methodist Church is committed to ensuring that all children and youth can engage in activities in a safe and secure environment. Whenever possible, each room set aside for a youth or children’s event will have a window in every door – removing the opportunity for secrecy and isolation.

CUMC will have on hand at least one copy of “*Safe Sanctuaries*” by Joy Melton (Discipleship Resources) and the accompanying video. These resources will be used as guidance for all those volunteering for our youth activities.

A Task Force is charged with implementing, maintaining, and monitoring the Safe Sanctuary procedures for CUMC’s staff and volunteers. According to the guidelines of the Baltimore Washington Conference, the task force will conduct a yearly review of CUMC’s Safe Sanctuary policy and make changes as needed. CUMC will certify yearly at Charge Conference that we developed, implemented, and continue to maintain a Safe Sanctuary policy.

CUMC will hold an annual training and orientation covering the guidelines regarding the Safe Sanctuary policy at CUMC.

7.2 Staff

All paid staff for CUMC will complete the following forms and return them to a SPRMT team member before employment:

1. Job Application
2. Authorization for Criminal Records Check
3. Sexual Misconduct Questionnaire
4. Confidentiality Agreement

All paid staff will undergo a background check processed through the Maryland Judiciary Case Search as well as a national data bank. This background check, based on name and Social Security Number, will be conducted every 5 years (if the individual is on staff during that period).

If any “flags” appear as a result of the background check or any reference interview, all references will be checked and interviewed in more detail. After all interviews have been completed, a determination will be made by SPRMT as to the appropriate course of action.

7.3 Volunteers

All volunteers for youth or children’s activities at CUMC must fill out the Sexual Misconduct Questionnaire (APPENDIX F). This includes providing the names, addresses, and phone numbers of three adults to serve as character references. CUMC will contact at least one of the references. If any “red flags” appear, all references will be contacted and a decision will be made based on all information gathered.

All volunteers will be required to view the video that accompanies Melton’s “*Safe Sanctuaries*.” This video explains the Safe Sanctuary policy concept in more detail and must be viewed before the individual may begin a volunteer assignment.

All volunteers will receive a written copy of CUMC’s Safe Sanctuary Policy and will be required to read said policy before volunteering. All volunteers must also sign the Participant Covenant Statement (APPENDIX E) – agreeing in writing to the provisions of the policy. Due to liability concerns, failure or refusal to agree to the terms of the Safe Sanctuary Policy will preclude the individual from qualifying for a volunteer assignment. The completed volunteer forms and data gathered will be kept in a locked file storage unit to be kept in the church office.

7.4 Allegations of Child Abuse

If and when an allegation of child abuse is made against a staff member or volunteer, CUMC will be prepared to do the following:

1. Notify the parents of the victim and take the necessary steps to ensure the safety of that child. THE SAFETY OF THE VICTIM WILL BE CUMC'S PRIMARY CONCERN.
2. Immediately remove the volunteer from any further involvement with youth or children. (The accused abuser will be treated with dignity as the investigation continues.)
3. Notify the proper authorities – law enforcement or child protective services – immediately.
4. Notify Conference authorities, the church's insurance agent and the church's attorney.
5. Keep a written record of the steps taken by the church in response to the allegation (APPENDIX D).
6. Cooperate fully with any investigations that are conducted.
7. Be honest in communicating to the congregation the situation and what steps are being taken, but also be very careful to protect both parties involved. Any communication should include a statement that assures the safety of all children and dispel any rumors that probably have taken place.
8. Offer any necessary psychological or financial support to any victim – both during an investigation as well as following the incident

7.5 Conclusion

Our congregation's purpose in establishing the Safe Sanctuary Policy and all accompanying procedures is to demonstrate our absolute commitment to the physical safety and spiritual growth of all of our children and youth.

In all our ministries with children and youth, CUMC 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).

For more information, see the Frequently Asked Questions document on the Conference's website at <http://www.bwcumc.org/content/safe-sanctuary-faqs>.