

ONALASKA UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

Safe Sanctuaries Policy

Approved 2017.02.28

Jesus said, *"Whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me"* (Matthew 18:5 NRSV). Children and youth are full participants in the life of Onalaska United Methodist Church and in the realm of God. Our Christian faith also charges us to protect the most vulnerable among us. Jesus sternly warned us not to put a stumbling stone before any of these little ones (Matthew 18:6).

Based on this scriptural grounding, in April 1996, the General Conference of The United Methodist Church adopted a resolution aimed at reducing the risk of sexual abuse of youth and children in the church. In 2011, the Wisconsin Annual Conference adopted a resolution requiring each congregation to develop a written Safe Sanctuaries Policy. Onalaska United Methodist Church adopted such a policy in 2002 and continues to periodically revise and update it according to current best practices.

A. Definitions

1. Adult – any person 18 years of age or older, unless they are participating as a youth in church programming.
2. Youth – any person in grades 6-12.
3. Child – any person in grade 5 or below.
4. Church programming – any activity, event, ministry, or program which is approved, organized, promoted, or sponsored by the church.
5. Staff – paid adult employees of the church who have been screened and hired by the Staff-Parish Relations Committee.
6. Assistants – unpaid adult assistants who help with church programming, and have been screened and trained by church staff. Assistants may work with children and youth in supervisory roles. Assistants will be at least three years older than the children/youth with whom they work.
7. Volunteers – unpaid volunteers who may work with children or youth in group situations supervised by staff or assistants. Volunteers may be adults or youth, and should be at least three years older than the children/youth with whom they work, at the discretion of staff.

B. Selection

1. A national criminal background check is required for staff and assistants who work with children and youth. Background checks must be renewed every two years. A driving record check will be required for transporting youth or children, and may be required more frequently than every two years.
2. Staff and assistants who have been convicted of physical or sexual abuse or neglect will not work with youth or children in church programming, with limited exceptions noted in section H in the Safe Sanctuaries Policy, "Registered Sex Offenders."
3. Staff and assistants must demonstrate an active relationship with the church.
4. All forms and reference reports used in selecting staff, assistants, and volunteers shall be kept for at least two years. Sensitive information such as background checks will be kept in a secure manner.

C. Rules and Guidelines

1. **Visibility:** All classroom doors where children or youth are regularly involved in church programming should have windows. The windows will remain unobstructed. If the door does not have a window, the door should remain open while the room is in use. Another adult should be in the vicinity even if he/she is not within listening distance.
2. **Two-Adult Rule:**
 - a. Two adults shall be present with children or youth for any church programming; at least one should be a staff member or assistant. Adults living in the same household working with the same group are considered one adult. If a second adult is not present in the room, the visibility rule applies and a staff member or assistant may supervise by “floating” in the area.
 - b. In the nursery, at least two qualified persons must supervise the children. One of these must be a staff person or assistant. The other may be a volunteer trained to work in the nursery. Any adult, whether assistant or volunteer, serving in the nursery must have a background check according to the church’s selection policy.
3. **One-on-One Contact:** Staff, assistants, and volunteers should not engage in unmonitored one-on-one contact with children or youth. In situations requiring personal conferences, the meeting should be conducted according to the visibility rule.
4. **Photography:** Permission is required from parents/guardians for publication of photos or videos of their youth or children by the church. Youth or children should only be identified by first name in photos and videos. Camera use is prohibited in restrooms and dressing rooms. The church is not responsible for pictures or videos taken unofficially by other attendees of an event.
5. **Incident Reporting:** Incidents such as fighting, stealing, drug use, or significant injury will be recorded on an incident report form (see J2) by the staff member or assistant present at the time. The staff member overseeing the church program will respond to the incident report in one week by contacting and/or meeting with the parents/guardians and the staff, assistants, or volunteers involved. The resolution of the incident will be recorded on the incident report form and filed for a minimum of two years. Any steps recommended to prevent similar incidents in the future will be communicated to the relevant staff, assistants, and volunteers.
6. **Permission Slips:** Written permission (see J3) from a parent/guardian is required for youth or child participation in an off-site or overnight event. Staff or assistants will keep these files. The leader of the event will carry copies of the permission forms during the event.
7. **Off-Site Events:**
 - a. If possible, there should be at least three people in each vehicle.
 - b. Youth are not allowed to be drivers for church programming unless they have written permission from a parent/guardian. Youth may not transport other youth or children.
8. **Overnight Guidelines:**
 - a. Adults may not sleep in the same rooms as youth, except (a) a parent/guardian and their own youth/child when no other youth/children are in the same room, and (b) a bunkhouse-style arrangement with more than four people per room.
 - b. Adults will not share a bed with a person of either gender under age 18, except a parent/guardian and their own youth/child.
 - c. Where group showers are provided, adults will not bathe at the same time as youth. Mixed gender bathing is not allowed.
 - d. If the youth/children are of both genders, the accompanying adults must be of both genders.

9. Bathroom Use Guidelines:
 - a. Nursery – staff, assistants, or volunteers may change diapers in the nursery, or may assist a child in the nursery bathroom provided the door remains partially open and another staff, assistant, or volunteer is present. Parents/guardians may request to be notified.
 - b. Children – staff or assistants should accompany children to the nearest bathroom. The adult should check the bathroom to make sure no one else is inside. The adult should wait outside the bathroom for the children to finish, and accompany them back to the classroom.
 - c. Youth – Staff or assistants should check occupancy of bathrooms on a regular basis by knocking, announcing their presence, and entering. Staff and assistants are responsible for knowing the location of all youth, including when they are in the bathroom.
10. Discipline: Staff, assistants, and volunteers will set up guidelines and create an environment that minimizes the need to discipline children or youth. If children or youth are behaving inappropriately, leaders will use techniques of guidance, redirection, positive reinforcement, and encouragement to change their behavior. Staff, assistants, and volunteers will not:
 - a. Strike, spank, shake, or slap anyone.
 - b. Humiliate, degrade, or threaten anyone.
 - c. Shame, withhold love, or speak or act cruelly.
 - d. Withhold food, water, or other basic necessities as punishment.

D. Training and Sharing

1. Staff and assistants will participate in an annual Safe Sanctuaries training at the beginning of each school year. Staff and volunteers who miss the annual training will read the Safe Sanctuaries Policy and discuss with a designated staff member. Following training, all staff and assistants will sign a form agreeing to abide by the Safe Sanctuaries policy (see J1).
2. Staff will be trained in first aid and CPR, and be aware of the location of first aid kits in the church building.
3. The Safe Sanctuaries Policy will be posted on the church website, and printed copies will be available from the church office.
4. A brochure summarizing the Safe Sanctuaries Policy will be available in the information rack and distributed to parents annually.

E. Abuse Reporting

1. When alleged abuse occurs during church programming, the staff or assistants who observe it or to whom it is reported are required to report the incident immediately to the pastor.
2. The pastor and the adult with direct knowledge of the alleged abuse shall immediately attempt to obtain all necessary information about the incident and fill out an incident report form (see J2).
3. The pastor shall contact the custodial parent or guardian as soon as possible to report the alleged abuse and schedule a face-to-face meeting.
4. The pastor, at his/her discretion, may contact the District Superintendent and the church's insurance representative.
5. At the request of the custodial parent or guardian, or at his/her own discretion, the pastor may report the incident to relevant civil authorities.

6. The pastor of the local church, or his/her designee, is the only person authorized to make statements to representatives of the media. All requests for statements should be directed to the pastor. This is a suggested statement:

"We at Onalaska United Methodist Church are saddened by these allegations. We have attempted to create a welcoming and safe environment, where all persons might experience the Good News in Jesus Christ. We are cooperating fully with local officials who are investigating this incident. Our Bishop's office has also been notified, and an investigation will be conducted through that office. If you desire more information, we will help you get in touch with our Bishop. This is all we can comment on at this time."

7. If the pastor is not available, the reporting adult should contact the Lay Leader, the chair of Staff-Parish Relations Committee, or the chair of Church Council, who will follow the reporting process.
8. If the pastor is the object of allegations, the Lay Leader and the chairs of Staff-Parish Relations Committee and Church Council shall meet with the District Superintendent to determine next steps.
9. Any person who engaged in the alleged abuse is required to refrain from all activities with children or youth until the incident is resolved. Removal of a person from activities should be handled discreetly if possible, recognizing that the investigation is still being conducted.

F. Visitation and Observation

1. Persons connected with the church are welcome to visit and observe church programming.
2. Unknown persons should be approached by staff or assistants to ascertain their needs.
 - a. If the unknown persons have a valid reason to be present, the staff or assistant will escort them to the proper place for visiting or observing.
 - b. If the unknown persons do not have a valid reason to be present, the staff or assistant will ask them to leave the church property or programming immediately. The pastor or leader in charge of the event will make sure the persons have left.

G. Disaster Plan

1. During an emergency, the staff or assistant leading the event should call 9-1-1 immediately.
2. Staff and assistants will remain with their group of children or youth at all times during an emergency.
3. Staff and assistants will maintain a head count of children and youth in their groups, and will recount them when they reach the designated safe area in an emergency. If anyone is missing, the leader in charge of the church programming should be notified immediately.
4. In case of fire, staff or assistants will take their group of children or youth out of the building through the nearest exit and gather in the parking lot south of the church, adjacent to the fire department.
5. If the disaster siren sounds, staff or assistants will take their group of children or youth to the interior severe weather shelter areas designated by posted signs. Children and youth should assume a safe position along the walls and remain there until notified it is safe to return to other areas.

H. Registered Sex Offenders

1. Staff or assistants may become aware that a registered sex offender is attending the church through a background check, through reliable public information such as the National Sex Offender Registry, or through communication with the individual.
2. Registered sex offenders will be asked by the Pastor and the chair of the Staff-Parish Relations Committee to enter into a covenant relationship with the church by signing the Safety Covenant Agreement (see J4).
3. Any registered sex offender refusing to sign the Safety Covenant Agreement (J4) will be prohibited from attending worship or other church programming where children or youth may be present.
4. A registered sex offender who signs the Safety Covenant Agreement (J4) may, at the careful and appropriate discretion of the pastor and chair of the Staff-Parish Relations Committee, be allowed to serve as an assistant or volunteer working with children or youth only under the following conditions:
 - a. The registered sex offender will not be placed in leadership of church programming.
 - b. The registered sex offender will never be left alone with children or youth. There will always be a second adult present.
 - c. The registered sex offender will not work in the nursery.
 - d. The registered sex offender will not transport children or youth.
 - e. The registered sex offender will not participate in overnight events.
 - f. The leader of the church programming at which the registered sex offender is assisting or volunteering will be made aware of the registered sex offender's Safety Covenant Agreement and will provide extra supervision.

I. Freewill Assistance

1. This Safe Sanctuaries Policy refers only to actions of staff, assistants, and volunteers engaged in church programming, and not to freewill assistance.
2. Freewill assistance consists of actions taken by a member of the church if the activity was done of his/her own freewill, and not as part of church programming. For example, if a church member of his/her own freewill offers to assist someone in the church or community at large in a way that is not organized or planned as part of church programming, that member is solely liable for anything he/she may do that injures himself/herself, another person, or property.
3. Onalaska United Methodist Church cannot be held liable for any acts of freewill assistance.

J. Forms (see file: OUMC Safe Sanctuaries Forms)

1. Safe Sanctuaries Policy Agreement
2. Incident Report Form
3. Child/Youth Permission Form
4. Safety Covenant Agreement

ONALASKA UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

J1. Safe Sanctuaries Policy Agreement

I am familiar with the Onalaska United Methodist Church Safe Sanctuaries Policy and agree to abide by it when serving as a staff or assistant in church programming.

Because the Safe Sanctuaries Policy is updated periodically, training is provided annually and this form must be renewed each year.

Signature: _____ Date: _____

Print Name: _____

The OUMC Safe Sanctuaries Policy is available from the church office, or on the Resources page of the church website (<http://www.onalaskaumc.org/resources>). A summary brochure is also available from the church information rack.

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J2. Incident Report Form

This form is used to report incidents involving children or youth at Onalaska United Methodist Church, in accordance with the church's Safe Sanctuaries Policy. Please report to the staff or assistant in charge of the church programming immediately. *In cases of alleged abuse, please report to the pastor or the chair of the Staff-Parish Relations Committee immediately.*

INCIDENT Location: _____ Date: _____ Time: _____

CHILDREN/YOUTH INVOLVED

Name: _____ Parents: _____ Date/time notified: _____

Name: _____ Parents: _____ Date/time notified: _____

Name: _____ Parents: _____ Date/time notified: _____

Name: _____ Parents: _____ Date/time notified: _____

WITNESSES

Name: _____ Phone: _____

Name: _____ Phone: _____

Name: _____ Phone: _____

Name: _____ Phone: _____

DESCRIPTION OF INCIDENT

ACTION TAKEN

STAFF OR ASSISTANT REPORTING

Signature: _____ Date: _____

Print Name: _____