

Child/Youth Abuse and Neglect Prevention Policy and Procedures

**BETHEL UNITED METHODIST CHURCH
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Prepared by The Pastor Parish Relations Committee

Bethel UMC Child Protection Policy – Approved April 15, 2007

I. Purpose

The goal of the Bethel United Methodist Church abuse and neglect prevention policy and procedures is to:

- 1) Provide a caring and secure environment for children, youth and at-risk adults in all phases of church life;
- 2) Reduce the risk of physical, emotional, and sexual abuse as they participate in church events;
- 3) Provide guidance to those who are entrusted with the care of our children;
- 4) Protect our staff and volunteers from false allegations of misconduct; and
- 5) Enable Bethel United Methodist Church to reduce its legal risk and liability exposure.

II. Biblical Foundation

Bethel United Methodist Church seeks to express God's love of children and provide for their personal wholeness. This caring community seeks to prevent child abuse of any form to our children and to be in ministry to families where abuse may occur. The Bible is foundational to our understanding upon which all policies, procedures and ministries must stand.

And they were bringing children to him, that He might touch them, and the disciples rebuked them. But when Jesus saw it He was indignant, and said to them, Let the children come to me, do not hinder them; for to such belongs the kingdom of God. Truly, I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child shall not enter it. And He took them in his arms and blessed them, laying his hands upon them. Mark 10:13-16.

Jesus teaches us explicitly that children have the right and the keys to the Kingdom of God. He demonstrated this through blessing and touch. Our goal in response to this Biblical mandate is to maintain a safe, secure and loving place for children -- a place where caregivers, teachers and leaders (both paid and volunteer) minister appropriately to their needs.

“Go out into the roads and lanes, and compel people to come in, so that my house may be filled.”

Luke 14:21 (NRSV)

In the Parable of the Great Banquet, Jesus reminds us that God is in the business of inviting all people to the table, where they can be nurtured and transformed to be Christ to others. Today, we continue to recognize that each individual is a child of God and must be allowed to live free of fear, surrounded by love. As Christian adults, we must establish and maintain a nurturing, loving, safe and secure Christian environment, providing support and assistance to our children, youth, and at-risk adults, remembering that our mandate is not only a responsibility, but also an opportunity to protect the gift that God has bestowed upon us.

“A new commandment I give you: Love one another.

As I have loved you, so you must love one another.”

John 13:34 (NIV)

Blessed are your eyes, because they see; and your ears, because they hear.

Matthew 13:16

III. Virginia's Child Abuse and Neglect Law

Under Virginia law, Section 63.2-100 of the Code of Virginia, 1950, as amended, an “abused or neglected child” is defined as any child less than eighteen years of age:

1. Whose parents or other person responsible for his care creates or inflicts, threatens to create or inflict, or allows to be created or inflicted upon such child a physical or mental injury by other than accidental means, or creates a substantial risk of death, disfigurement, or impairment of bodily or mental functions;
2. Whose parents or other person responsible for his care neglects or refuses to provide care necessary for his health. However, no child who in good faith is under treatment solely by spiritual means through prayer in accordance with the tenets and practices of a recognized church or religious denomination shall for that reason alone be considered to be an abused or neglected child;
3. Whose parents or other person responsible for his care abandons such child;
4. Whose parents or other person responsible for his care commits or allows to be committed any act of sexual exploitation or any sexual act upon a child in violation of law;
5. Who is without parental care or guardianship caused by the unreasonable absence or the mental or physical incapacity of the child’s parent, guardian, legal custodian or other person standing in loco parentis. (Emphasis added).

Child abuse may be physical, sexual, emotional or mental, and may be the result of actions or omissions to act (e.g. lack of care for a child).

Section 63.2-1509 of the Code of Virginia, 1950, as amended, provides that:

The following persons who, in their professional or official capacity, have reason to suspect that a child is an abused or neglected child, **shall** report the matter immediately to the local department of the county or city wherein the child resides or wherein the abuse or neglect is believed to have occurred or to the Department’s toll-free child abuse and neglect hotline (1-800-552-7096):

1. Any person licensed to practice medicine or any of the healing arts;
2. Any hospital resident or intern, and any person employed in the nursing profession;
3. Any person employed as a social worker;
4. Any probation officer;
5. Any teacher or other person employed in a public or private school, kindergarten, or nursery school;
6. Any person providing full-time or part-time child care for pay on a regularly planned basis;
7. Any duly accredited Christian Science practitioner;
8. Any mental health professional;
9. Any law-enforcement officer;
10. Any mediator eligible to receive court referrals pursuant to Section 8.01-576.8 of the Virginia Code;
11. Any professional staff person, not previously enumerated, employed by a private or state-operated hospital, institution or facility to which children have been committed or where children have been placed for care and treatment;
12. Any person associated with or employed by any private organization responsible for the care, custody or control of children; and
13. Any person who is designated a court-appointed special advocate pursuant to Article 5 (Section 9.1-151 et seq.) of Chapter 1 of Title 9.1. (Emphasis added).

In addition, everyone should report any known or reasonable suspected child abuse immediately as

described in Item V Reporting Child Abuse. Any report is confidential and the person making the report is immune from liability for making such a report, unless it is proven that such a person acted in bad faith or with malicious intent.

A definition and examples of child abuse appear in the Appendix One and Physical and Behavioral Indicators of abuse and neglect appear in Appendix Two.

Bethel United Methodist Church is exempt from Virginia licensure requirements, pursuant to Section 63.2-1715(A)(10) of the Code of Virginia, 1950, as amended, as it operates a program of religious instruction, such as Sunday schools, vacation Bible schools, and child-minding services provided to allow parents or guardians who are on site to attend religious worship or instructional services.

IV. Reducing the Risk of Child Abuse

In an effort to create the safest possible environment within Bethel United Methodist Church (UMC), several abuse prevention measures will be used. Wherever used the words “child, children or youth” will refer to any individual who has not yet reached the age of 18. These measures include:

A. Six Month Rule

Bethel United Methodist Church will not use anyone as a volunteer worker with children or youth in the church or in church-related activities unless during the preceding six months they have been actively involved at Bethel United Methodist Church on a continuous basis.

B. Staff Screening

All paid and volunteer workers with children will be asked to sign and have notarized, a statement indicating that he/she has never been convicted of child abuse nor had such a conviction expunged. Also, this screening form will ask for information about: criminal convictions, prior church membership *and* prior church volunteer work. Anyone who has had a child abuse conviction or expungement, as well as anyone refusing to sign the statement will not be permitted to work with children. In addition, applicants for paid staff *and* volunteer positions will undergo a criminal records check and, as deemed necessary by the Pastor Parish Relations Committee (PPR), records check by the Virginia Department of Social Services. These checks will be at the expense of the Church. Forms for accomplishing these tasks will be provided by the PPR Committee and are available for review upon request.

For volunteers working solely with the Boy Scout program, the Troop must submit to the PPR committee a copy of the BSA adult volunteer application, which includes the volunteer’s SSN and his/her signature authorizing the background check.

The Bethel PPR committee may, at its discretion, require individuals to periodically reaffirm that they are free of any charge related to child abuse and/or to resubmit to a national criminal records check and/or check through the Virginia Department of Social Services. All costs associated with the records check will be born by the Church.

The final decision of the suitability of an individual to work with children at Bethel is the responsibility of the PPR Committee.

C. Staff Training

All paid and volunteer workers with children will be required to read the church's abuse policy and sign a form indicating that they have read and understand the policy and agree to abide by it. If the worker does not sign after consultation, that person will not be permitted to serve. First year teachers or workers will also be required to attend one training session related to the church's abuse policy during the course of their first year of service. These training sessions will be offered by the church, conducted by clergy and/or members of the Child/Youth Protection Policy Committee and held at various times throughout the year as needed. All workers at a Vacation Bible School held at Bethel United Methodist Church will be required to read the policy and sign the acknowledgement form before the start of Vacation Bible School. When Vacation Bible School is held at other churches, only teachers from the Bethel congregation will be required to comply with this policy.

Leaders of community groups who are allowed to lead children's activities on Bethel UMC property will be required to read the policy and sign an acknowledgement form. Church facilities will not be available to groups whose leaders refuse to read and sign the policy. Volunteers serving solely in support of the Scouting program will not be required to take the Bethel training as long as they complete the Boy Scout Youth Protection Training and provide a copy of their completion certificate or card to the Child/Youth Protection Policy Committee.

D. Two Adult Rule

Teachers and workers (competent adults) age eighteen and over will be assigned in teams of two or more when dealing with children under the age of eighteen in any church activity. The two persons should not be related. Two related persons can serve as volunteers as long as another non-related adult is present. Other church sponsored or community groups of children who meet at the church must have two or more leaders present at all times. When the group includes both boys and girls, both male and female leaders should be present. If the group stays overnight at the church, or if a church sponsored group leaves the premises, two or more leaders must be present and must include at least one male and female if the group is mixed gender.

In the case where one of the two assigned leaders/teachers is not present, classes will continue as scheduled but the classroom door must remain open at all times and teachers of other classes must be notified so they might be available to assist as needed.

In special circumstances such as baby-sitting for Bible Studies, two or more youth under the age of 18 may be used provided they are Red Cross certified baby sitters. A copy of their certificate must be on file with the church. In these circumstances, the adults in charge of the Bible Study will periodically visit the childcare area over the course of the class period to assure that there are no problems

E. One-on-One Mentoring or Consultation

Any one-on-one mentoring or consultation between an adult and a child will be conducted in a room or area that is in plain view of others.

F. Classroom Discipline

All teachers and workers will use the following discipline measures. If a child is behaving inappropriately, the worker will tell the child specifically what he/she is doing that is not acceptable and state what the expected behavior is. If inappropriate behavior continues, the child may be placed at a table to work alone away from the other students. If the child's disruptive behavior continues, the child

may be taken from the classroom and left under the supervision of appropriate adults. No physical punishment or verbal abuse, e.g., ridicule, are to be used at any time. If isolating the child within the classroom or removal of the child from the room becomes necessary, the situation will be discussed with the child's parents or guardian as soon as possible. Parents are responsible to discuss appropriate behavior with their children prior to coming to class and after any incidents in the classroom.

G. Open Classrooms

Classrooms or childcare rooms will be visited periodically, without prior notice, by members of the PPR committee, church staff, parents, or other volunteer church workers. As far as possible, all classrooms or meeting areas will have visual access from the hallway and no classroom door be locked during occupancy. **(I have emailed Roger asking the Trustees to put glass in the Sunday room doors)**

H. Transportation to and from Bethel UMC

Parents or legal guardians are responsible for transporting children to and from Bethel UMC. Bethel UMC staff and Bethel UMC volunteers will not transport children to or from Bethel UMC except in their personal capacity. These individuals will not provide such transportation in their capacity as a volunteer or employee of Bethel UMC.

I. Transportation to Off-Site Activities

Bethel UMC will provide transportation to off-site activities sponsored by Bethel UMC. Generally, such transportation will be by automobile. When transporting children or youth to off-site activities, no automobile will contain only one adult (driver) and one child. Automobiles will contain either one driver and two or more children or two adults and any number of children up to the legal capacity of the automobile. Separate seat belts must be available for all passengers. Children MAY NOT ride in the back of pick up trucks. Additionally, all drivers will possess a current driver's license, will be over twenty-one (21) years of age and automobiles will be legally licensed, inspected and insured (\$100,000/\$300,000). Youth will not be allowed to transport youth to church sponsored events. Speed limits and all traffic regulations will be obeyed at all times.

J. Permission Slips

All participants under the age of 18 will provide permission slips from parents or legal guardians for any activity held off-site. At a minimum, the permission slip will include the youth's name, the date of the activity, the location(s) or description of the activity, the signature of the parent or legal guardian and the date signed. Forms for this purpose are available from the church office or the PPR committee.

K. Child/Youth Protection Policy Committee

Bethel United Methodist Church PPR Committee will serve as the Child/Youth Protection Policy Committee.

The responsibilities as related to Child/Youth Protection Policy are:

1. Administering the Policy
 - a. Securing all forms as required by this policy.
 - b. Requesting investigation.
 - c. Checking on personal and work references.

- d. Discussing confidential recommendations to regarding hiring.
- e. Any necessary follow-up.
- f. Filing forms with the church records.
2. Scheduling and arranging training for all workers with children.
3. Making recommendations for keeping the policy current to the Board of Trustees.

V. Reporting Child Abuse

Should there be an allegation of child abuse at Bethel United Methodist Church, the following procedures shall be followed:

1. Any allegation of child abuse shall be treated seriously.
2. Pray for the church and all persons affected by the allegation.
3. Immediately begin documenting what happened and what was done in handling the allegation. The statements below cover many of the things that will need to happen.
4. Immediately notify the pastor and/or a member of the PPR Committee of the substance of the allegations, unless the allegations involve the pastor. The person notified shall immediately contact the pastor and/or other members of the Committee. As many members of the Committee as are immediately accessible shall be convened either in person or by telephone and the allegations shall be evaluated initially to determine whether there is a reason to suspect that child abuse may have occurred. The function of the PPR at this stage is not to conduct an investigation, but to determine, based upon the allegations and the information then in the possession of the Committee, whether a reason to suspect exists. In making such a determination, the PPR shall avail itself of such counsel as it deems necessary and as is immediately available, including, but not limited to, consultation with an attorney, with a representative of the church's insurance company, with the district superintendent, and anonymously with the Virginia Department of Social Services.
 - a. If the allegations involve the pastor, the Chairperson of the PPR shall be notified immediately and he or she shall immediately notify the district superintendent who shall direct the next steps taken by the church in responding to the allegations. The provisions of this Policy shall continue to apply except as the district superintendent directs that other steps be taken.
5. If the PPR determines that there is a reason to suspect that child abuse may have occurred, then the following steps shall be taken:
 - a. Immediately notify the Virginia Department of Social Services of the allegation.
 - b. Immediately notify the parents if it is not known that they have previous knowledge.
 - c. Immediately notify the church's insurance company.
 - d. Immediately notify the district superintendent.

6. Do not confront the accused with the allegation. If the accused has assigned duties within the life of the church and the PPR determines that the steps outlined in paragraph VI (5) above are appropriate, that person must be temporarily relieved of their duties until the investigation is concluded.

7. The pastor should extend whatever care and resources are necessary to those impacted by the allegation, but under **no** circumstances should the pastor or any church leader or 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.

8. It is appropriate to show care and comfort for the alleged victim. This should be the pastoral objective from the moment the allegation is received or otherwise made known.

9. Observe confidentiality for both the alleged victim and the accused until advised to the contrary by the PPR.

10. There shall be a single spokesperson for the Church who shall be designated by the PPR.

VI. Policy Review

The Child/Youth Protection Policy and Procedures of Bethel United Methodist Church shall be reviewed annually by the PPR and then by the Trustees and Administrative Council. A verification follow-up report will be made each year at Charge Conference to insure the integrity of the policy and procedures.

Revised by the Pastor Parish Relations Committee

Approved for the Pastor Parish Relations Committee by the Chair (<i>James D. Templeton</i>) /s/ James D. Templeton	Date 4/15/2007
Approved for the Bethel Trustees by the Chair (<i>Roger Broadbent</i>) /s/ Roger Broadbent	Date 4/15/2007
Adopted by the Administrative Council & Signed by Chair (<i>Kevin Lee</i>) /s/ Kevin Lee	Date 4/15/2007

APPENDIX ONE: Types of Child Abuse

A. Definition

Child abuse refers to an act committed by a parent, caregiver or person in a position of trust (even though he/she may not care for the child on a daily basis) which is not accidental and which harms or threatens to harm a child's physical or mental health or welfare. The following definitions and explanations in this section are from the Virginia Department of Social Services.

B. Types of Abuse

1. Physical Abuse

A physical injury, threat of injury or creation of a real and significant danger or substantial risk of death, disfigurement or impairment of bodily functions. Such injury or threat of injury, regardless of intent, is inflicted or allowed to be inflicted by non-accidental means. Examples: asphyxiation; bone fracture; brain damage, skull fracture, subdural hematoma, burns, scalding; cuts, bruises, welts, abrasions, internal injuries, poisoning; sprains, dislocations, gunshot, stabbing wounds.

2. Physical Neglect

The failure to provide food, clothing, shelter, or supervision for a child if the child's health or safety is endangered. Physical neglect may include multiple occurrences or a one-time critical or severe event that results in a threat to health or safety, such as a toddler left alone. Other types of neglect include abandonment, inadequate supervision, inadequate personal hygiene, inadequate food and malnutrition.

3. Sexual Abuse

Sexual abuse includes any act defined in the Code of Virginia that is committed, or allowed to be committed, upon a child by his/her parent or other persons responsible for the child's care. Examples of such abuse are: sexual exploitation, sexual molestation, intercourse/sodomy and other sexual abuse.

4. Medical Neglect

Refusal or failure by caretaker to obtain and/or follow through with a complete regimen of medical, mental or dental care for a condition, which if untreated, could result in illness or developmental delays.

5. Failure to Thrive

A syndrome of infancy or early childhood that is characterized by growth failure, signs of severe malnutrition, and variable degrees of developmental retardation. Children are considered to be in this category only when the syndrome is diagnosed by a physician and is caused by non-organic factors.

6. Mental Abuse/Neglect

A pattern of acts or omissions by the caretaker that result in harm to a child's psychological or emotional health or development.

7. Educational Neglect

The child's caretaker is directly responsible for the failure of the child to attend school or an approved alternative program of study.

8. Bizarre Discipline

Any actions in which the caretaker uses eccentric, irrational or grossly inappropriate procedure or

devices to modify the child's behavior.

APPENDIX TWO: Recognizing Child Abuse and Neglect

1. Physical Abuse

A. Physical Indicators

- Unexplained bruises on face, torso, back, buttocks, thighs
- Multiple injuries in various stages of healing
- Bruises/welts resembling instrument used e.g. belt, cord
- Human bite marks
- Injuries regularly appearing after absence, weekend, etc.
- Unexplained fractures, lacerations, abrasions

B. Behavioral Indicators

- Reports injury by caretaker
- Uncomfortable with physical contact
- Complains of soreness or moves uncomfortably
- Wears clothing inappropriate to weather (to cover body)
- Afraid to go home
- Chronic runaway (adolescents)
- Behavior extremes (withdrawn, aggressive)
- Apprehensive when other children cry

2. Physical Neglect

A. Physical Indicators

- Consistent hunger, poor hygiene
- Unattended physical problems or medical needs
- Consistent lack of supervision
- Abandonment

B. Behavioral Indicators

- Reports no caretaker at home
- Begs, steals food
- Frequently absent or tardy
- Constant fatigue, listlessness, or falling asleep in class
- Extended stays at school (early arrival and late departure)
- Shunned by peers

3. Sexual Abuse

A. Physical Indicators

- Sexually transmitted disease (pre-teens)
- Pregnancy
- Difficulty walking or sitting
- Pain or itching in genital area
- Torn, stained, or bloody underclothing
- Bruises/bleeding in external genitalia

B. Behavioral Indicators

- Reports sexual abuse
- Highly sexualized play
- Detailed, age inappropriate understanding of sexual behavior
- Role reversal, overly concerned for siblings
- Chronic runaway
- Excessive seductiveness
- Suicide attempts (adolescents)
- Deterioration in academic performance
- Sudden, noticeable behavior changes

4. Emotional Maltreatment

A. Physical Indicators

- Speech disorders
- Delayed physical development
- Learning problems

B. Behavioral Indicators

- Habit disorders (sucking, biting, rocking in older child)
- Antisocial, destructive
- Passive and aggressive behavior extremes
- Appears to derive pleasure from hurting others or animals

A combination or pattern of indicators should alert you to the possibility of maltreatment. Indicators should be considered together with the explanation provided, the child's developmental and physical capabilities, and behavior changes.

From the brochure entitled, "Recognizing, Reporting and Preventing Child Abuse and Neglect in Virginia" published by the Virginia Department of Social Services, 730 East Broad Street, Richmond, Virginia 23219.