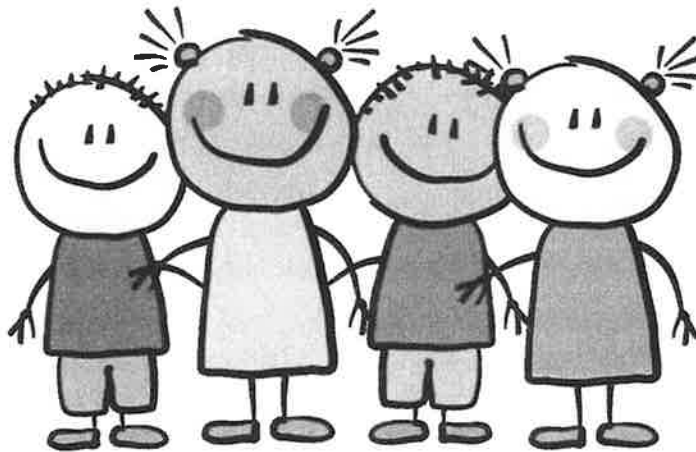


Safe Sanctuaries

A Ministry of the United Methodist Church

Child/Youth/Vulnerable Adult Protection Policy



BETHEL UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

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Prepared by the Staff Parish Relations Committee

Bethel UMC Child Protection Policy – 9/26/2023

Safe Sanctuaries: Child/Youth/Vulnerable Adult Protection Policy
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A. Introduction

Abuse prevention and ministry protection policies and procedures are essential for all churches, for both the protection and safety of our children, youth, and other vulnerable persons, and also for our volunteers and staff working with them.

The Gospel calls us to be engaged in ministry with children, youth, and other vulnerable persons. Jesus taught, “Whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me” (Mark 9:37 NRSV) and “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 NRSV).

We should not allow possible risks to undermine or stop our ministry. Rather, we must:

- Provide a caring, safe, and secure environment for children, youth, and other vulnerable persons in all phases of church life
- Provide guidance to those who are entrusted with the care of our children
- Protect our staff and volunteers from false allegations of misconduct
- Enable Bethel United Methodist Church to reduce its legal risk and liability exposure
- Continue to answer the Gospel’s imperative to be in ministry with children, youth, and other vulnerable persons, thus making a difference in their lives.

Safe Sanctuaries policies and implementation of practices that reflect those policies seek to fulfil this call for our church. For purposes of Bethel policies and procedures, children are ages 0-12 years or before the start of 6th grade, youth are 6th graders - 12th graders, and vulnerable adults are designated by their caregivers. Legally, anyone under 18 years of age is considered a child.

B. Volunteer/Staff Selection Policies

All volunteer and paid staff who work with children, youth, and other vulnerable people at Bethel UMC will be:

- At least 21 years old. Exceptions apply for approved youth helpers.
- At least five years older than the oldest child/youth they will be supervising.
- A regular attendee at BUMC for at least six months. Rare exceptions may be made in consultation with the pastor in charge for special situations.

All volunteer and paid staff (including clergy) who work with children, youth and other vulnerable people at BUMC will:

- Complete and sign an application and the related waivers giving permission to check references and background information.

- Provide the names and contact information of two non-related personal references.
- Undergo a criminal background check if they will have leadership responsibility for children/youth/other vulnerable people. Individuals who have been convicted of physical or sexual abuse or neglect may not work in any church-sponsored activity or program for preschoolers, children, youth or other vulnerable people.
- Be interviewed for suitability for the work they desire to do. Interviews will be conducted by the leader of the program in which the applicant will work. Church policy and guidelines should be discussed during the interview.

For volunteers working solely with the scouting or youth programs using our facilities, Bethel will rely on background checks already required for all adult leaders and on the child protection training provided by their organization.

Whenever BUMC hosts an activity involving children, youth, or other vulnerable people from another church or community organization, groups using the church facility will follow BUMC's Safe Sanctuaries Policy.

The Bethel SPRC 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.

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

C. Volunteer/Staff Training

Prior to working in the youth's or children's ministries (or any area including other vulnerable people), workers must undergo child protection safety training. Comprehensive training on issues of child sexual abuse in church settings shall be required for all clergy, paid staff, and volunteers (e.g., youth group leaders) who regularly supervise activities for children, youth, and other vulnerable people.

Bethel UMC volunteer and paid staff, including clergy, will be given the opportunity for training about Safe Sanctuaries policies, procedures, and child abuse issues on a regular basis. This training should be offered at least annually. Volunteers and staff will be rescreened every three years.

D. Ministry Supervision Guidelines

For all activities involving children and youth at Bethel:

- Parents are responsible for ensuring that their children get to the appropriate classroom or designated meeting location. If a child leaves a classroom or the sanctuary, he/she must be accompanied by his/her parent or an approved volunteer.
- At least two non-related adults (including at least one screened adult) will always be present.
- Children, youth, and other vulnerable people will be checked into and out of a church-sponsored activity by their parent or legal guardian or people authorized by the parent/legal guardian.
- Participants will have access to a telephone or cell phone when groups are at or away from the church facility.
- One-on-one interactions with children and youth will be with an open door and visible to all. The pastor, parent or guardian, or another screened adult should be aware of any such interactions.
- Activities with children, youth and other vulnerable populations should be publicly accessible. Parents or legal guardians or people authorized by the parent/legal guardian have the right to visit and observe the children's/youth's/other vulnerable person's activity, classroom, or church sponsored program at any time, unannounced as long as the two-adult rule is being followed. Exceptions to this right may be issued at the discretion of church leadership.
- All classroom and office doors will have a window or be visible from the hallway, or doors should remain open while the room is occupied.
- Windows will be kept free from covering.
- If the two-adult rule cannot be observed, a screened, designated roamer will regularly check on groups with only one adult.
- For overnight events at the church and church-sponsored off-premise activities, two or more screened adults must be present. This arrangement must include at least one male and one female if the group is mixed gender.
- 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 babysitters. 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.

Adequate Supervision will be provided at all times:

- One adult to every four children, zero to 16 months of age.
- One adult to five children, ages 16 to 24 months

- One adult to eight children, ages 24 months to 36 months
 - One adult to ten children, ages three to school age
 - One adult to 12 children, grades K-12
- The specific needs of individual children may require a change to these guidelines.

E. Transportation

Whenever BUMC transports children, youth, or other vulnerable people away from the church campus:

- No youth should drive to/from events.
- An adult should never transport a child/youth alone. 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.
- Drivers of church vehicles should be approved and covered by the church's insurance company.
- Drivers should go through the same screening process as all other paid/volunteer staff.
- All participants under the age of 18 will provide permission slips from parents or legal guardians for any activity held off-site. A copy of each signed permission slip must be on file at the church office.

F. Electronic Communications

The use of electronics or media communications may be useful tools in supporting ministries with children, youth, and other vulnerable people. However, in such circumstances, the following requirements shall be met:

- The volunteer or staff person shall never initiate a connection (friending, following, etc.) on social media.
- If a student initiates a connection, the child, youth, or vulnerable person's parent or guardian as well as the leader in charge shall be notified.
- If an adult leader receives a private text from a child, youth, or vulnerable person that seems to be questionable, the adult leader should immediately end the conversation in the virtual space and offer opportunities to have the conversation in person and in compliance with the earlier guidelines for one-on-one conversations. The ministry supervisor and/or parent/guardian should be made aware of the incident immediately. If an in-person meeting is not possible, those involved will determine the most reasonable alternative in compliance with the earlier guidelines for one-on-one conversations.
- Adult leaders should post photos on social network sites only with prior written permission

granted by a parent/guardian. When posted, PHOTOS MUST NOT BE TAGGED with names or location indicators. All photos must be appropriate and in keeping with the spirit of the ministry event.

- All in-person protection policies apply to online platform meetings like Zoom, Skype, Messenger, and so on. (For example, two unrelated adults should be present in the virtual room just as they would be in a physical room.)
- An official church account should be established and used for online activities, not a personal account.
- Communication about online meetings should be shared with parents/guardians as well as with children, youth, and other vulnerable people.
- Adult leaders and participants should use their real names as usernames.
- Attendance of online meetings should be documented.
- All electronic communications shall be documented and retained.

G. Discipline Measures

All leaders and workers with children and youth will use the following discipline measures. If a child is behaving inappropriately, the leader or worker will tell the child specifically what he/she is doing that is not acceptable and state what the expected behavior is, e.g., “We do not throw blocks. We use blocks for building.” If this measure is not effective, the child will be guided to another activity. 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 after these steps have been taken, the child may be taken to the primary leader for the activity and left under his or her supervision. 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. It is highly recommended, depending on the seriousness of the behavior that a third impartial person such as the Chair or other designated represented of the SPRC be in attendance.

H. Policy Review

The Child/Youth/Vulnerable Adult Protection Policy of Bethel United Methodist Church shall be reviewed as needed by the SPRC and then by the Trustees and Church Council. A verification follow-up report will be made as needed at Charge Conference to ensure the integrity of the policy and procedures.

In all our ministries with children, youth, and vulnerable people, Bethel United Methodist Church is committed to demonstrating the love of Jesus Christ so that each of God’s children here will be “surrounded by steadfast love, established in the faith, and confirmed and strengthened in the way that leads to life eternal.” (United Methodist Hymnal, p.44.) This Child, Youth, and Other Vulnerable People Protection Policy is adopted by action of the of the Bethel United Methodist Church this 26th day of September , 2023.

Approved for the Pastor Parish Relations Committee (<i>Rosanne Williamson</i>) <i>Rosanne J. Williamson</i>	Date 9/26/2023
Approved for the Bethel Trustees and signed by the Chair (<i>Ava Lee</i>) <i>Ava K. Lee</i>	Date 9/28/2023
Adopted by the Church Council and Signed by Chair (<i>Nancy Pinson</i>) <i>Nancy Pinson</i>	Date 9/28/2023

References:

I. 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

II. Virginia's Child Abuse and Neglect Law

Under, 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, including but not limited to, a child who is with his parent or other person responsible for his care either (i) during the manufacture or attempted manufacture of a Schedule I or II controlled substance, or (ii) during the unlawful sale of such substance by that child's parents or other person responsible for his care, where such manufacture, or attempted manufacture or unlawful sale would constitute a felony violation of § 18.2-248;
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. Or
6. Whose parents or other person responsible for his care creates a substantial risk of physical or mental injury by knowingly leaving the child alone in the same dwelling, including an apartment as defined in § 55-79.2, with a person to whom the child is not related by blood or marriage and who the parent or other person responsible for his care knows has been convicted of an offense against a minor for which registration is required as a violent sexual offender pursuant to § 9.1-902.

An act of child abuse may be committed by any person responsible for the care of another individual who is less than eighteen years of age. It does not matter whether the person caring for the child under the age of 18 (hereinafter referred to as a "Child" or "Children", which term as used in this Policy also includes youth ages 12-18) is a compensated or a volunteer worker. It does not matter whether the person routinely is entrusted with the care of children or whether such individual only occasionally comes in contact with children. It does not matter whether the person was entrusted with the care of a child for an hour or only a moment. It only matters that a child was abused or neglected by the person who, on the occasion in question, was responsible for the child's care.

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.

III. Types of Child Abuse

A. Definition

Child abuse refers to an act committed by a parent, care giver 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 of 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 clothing, inadequate shelter, inadequate personal hygiene, inadequate food and malnutrition.
3. **Sexual Abuse:** Sexual abuse includes any act defined in the code of Virginia which 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 which 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 which 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 procedures or devices to modify the child's behavior

IV. Child/Youth Protection Policy Committee

Bethel United Methodist Church SPRC 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 SPRC 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 SPRC 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 SPRC 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.
5. If the allegations involve the pastor, the Chairperson of the SPRC 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.
6. If the SPRC 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.
7. Do not confront the accused with the allegation. If the accused has assigned duties within the life of the church and the SPRC 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.
8. 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.

9. 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.
10. Observe confidentiality for both the alleged victim and the accused until advised to the contrary by the SPRC.
11. There shall be a single spokesperson for the Church who shall be designated by the SPRC.