

# **Child/Youth Abuse and Neglect Prevention Policy and Procedures**

**BETHEL UNITED METHODIST CHURCH**

**6903 Blantyre Road**

**Warrenton, Virginia 20187**

**(540) 347-4874**

**Prepared by the Pastor Parish Relations Committee**

# 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, 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;

Any mediator eligible to receive court referrals pursuant to Section 8.01-576.8 of the Virginia Code;

10. 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;
11. Any person associated with or employed by any private organization responsible for the care, custody or control of children; and
12. 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. 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



## **V. 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. These measures include screening of paid and volunteer workers for past child abuse convictions or expungements, provision for regular training on child abuse issues to paid and volunteer staff members, use of the two leader rule, standards of appropriate classroom discipline and open classrooms. 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.

For volunteers working solely with the Boy Scout or Cub Scout programs, Bethel will rely on background checks already required for all adult leaders and on the Youth Protection Training provided by the BSA and required to be completed by all leaders every two years.

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 and youth 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 programs such as Vacation Bible School and Crosswalk which are held at Bethel United Methodist Church will be required to read the policy and sign the acknowledgement form before the start of such programs. When child or youth related programs are 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

## **D. Two Adult Rule**

Leaders will be assigned in teams of two or more for all children or youth activities. These two leaders will be unrelated adults age 18 or older and at least 5 years older than the children and youth they are with. If the group is divided, each subgroup will have two leaders. If there are not two leaders available for each group, then either the group will be combined with another group to make possible the presence of two leaders or the activity will be canceled on that occasion. Community groups of children or youth who meet at the church must have two or more leaders present who have signed this form. 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. Adequate Supervision**

Adequate supervision will be provided at all times:

- One adult to three children, zero to twelve months of age.
- One adult to four children, ages twelve to twenty-four months
- One adult to six children, ages twenty-four months to thirty-six months
- One adult to eight children, ages three to eighteen years

The specific needs of individual children may require a change to these guidelines.

## **F. 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.



## **G. Classroom Discipline**

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 representative of the PPR be in attendance.

## **H. 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. 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.

## **J. 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 pickup 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.

## **K. 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. A copy of each signed permission slip must be on file at the church office.



## **L. Escorting of Children and Youth**

Parents are responsible for assuring 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.

## **M. Cell Phones and Personal Media Devices**

- 1) Students will NOT be allowed to have their cell phones turned on during scheduled activities at the event unless the use of cell phones is necessary as a critical part of the event. In other words, students' cell phones should only be on during free time or approved on a case by case basis by the leaders.
- 2) Students are HIGHLY DISCOURAGED from using their cell phones at other times during the event. The purpose of our time together is to learn how we can be more faithful Disciples of Christ in the world and to build community with one another. Constant phone conversations and text messaging with others severely distract from our purpose and decrease the potential for growth and learning.
- 3) It is recommended that the use of cell phones and personal media devices be discouraged during travel as this is also an optimum time to build community among participants. At the discretion of the youth director/leader they may be used if required as part of an ongoing activity.
- 4) Should a parent need to reach their youth during scheduled event activities in the case of an emergency, please call the number of the event facility (provided in registration and group leader packet information).
- 5) Any student who uses their cell phone (including text messaging) or any other personal media device during worship, small groups, workshops, or other scheduled activity unless specifically approved in advance by the event leader will have that item taken away from them by an adult and not returned until the end of the event.

## **N. Church Sponsored Web Sites/Social Media**

Church-authorized social networking and blogging is used to convey information about Bethel UMC, raise awareness of church activities and events, communicate with members, and otherwise work toward our mission to worship, win, disciple and serve to the glory of God. When communicating through social media, Bethel UMC must ensure that the content and style used maintains our identity, integrity and reputation. The following guidelines apply to social media when authorized by Bethel UMC and done for church-related purposes:

- 1) **Creating Sites:** Only authorized employees or volunteers may create sites that represent Bethel UMC or any of its ministry areas. "Sites" include creating Groups or Pages within social media.
  - a) Such authorization to create a site should be obtained from the Church Council.

- b) Official sites must have more than one individual as an authorized administrator and employees/volunteers are required to turn over passwords and administrative privileges in the event they leave Bethel UMC or move on to a different position.
- 2) Posting Content:** Only authorized individuals may post content to church approved sites. “Posting” includes using church sites to make announcements, distributing media, and initiating topics of discussion.
- a) The publication of confidential information is prohibited.
  - b) Responsible individuals are expected to comply with copyright laws and avoid plagiarism.
  - c) Any copyrighted information where written reprint information has not been obtained in advance cannot be posted but if it already resides elsewhere on the web, a link can be provided.
  - d) If uncertain about any information, material or conversation, discuss the content with the Chair of the Church Council.
- 3) Commenting:** If individuals participate in discussion on church-sponsored social sites by commenting on posts, the following guidelines should be observed. Comments should only be factual or positive in nature.
- a) Constructive criticism should be communicated privately, not through social media.
  - b) Comments should be worded with great care to avoid unnecessarily offending any group or individual. Individuals who are perceived as offensive, even if that is not their intention, may be asked to attend training and/or asked not to comment on church sites.
  - c) Only authorized individuals should attempt to respond to a comment that is critical of the church or a church leader, and/or may be deemed obscene or offensive.
  - d) Individuals should report any concerns about inappropriate comments to the Chair of the Church Council.
- 4) Password Access:** Any website that is created as a place for our youth to connect via electronic media should be controlled by the use of passwords so as to limit access to only our active youth participants. Periodically, or at least once a year, the pass words should be changed in order to maintain the security of the group.
- 5) Unofficial Sites:** Bethel UMC cannot control and cannot be responsible for sites started by non-approved individuals or subgroups of the church on their own initiative (e.g. classes, small groups, or individual church members). However, individuals who have a position of leadership in a ministry area are expected to use their influence to encourage groups and individuals in their area of ministry to communicate online in a manner in keeping with the mission and values of the church. They should also advise groups and individuals not to represent themselves as official church sites and they should report any unofficial sites which they become aware of that are not acting in keeping with the mission and values of the church to the Chair of the Church Council to determine if further action is necessary.



- 6) General Media Guidelines:** The following guidelines apply to all social networking media, including but not limited to Facebook, Twitter, MySpace and personal web pages.
- a) Each individual is personally responsible for the content that they publish online. Be mindful that what you publish on a social media network, such as Facebook or Twitter, is viewed not only by the intended recipient but any and all individuals who have access to that individual's account. Your online behavior should reflect the same, if not greater, standards of honesty, respect and consideration than you use face to face. Remember that online communications are in writing and not subject to a "he said, she said" defense.
  - b) Remember your association and responsibility with Bethel UMC in online social environments. If you identify yourself as a Bethel volunteer or member, ensure your profile and related content is consistent with how you wish to present yourself with colleagues, parents and children/youth.
  - c) Even if you DO NOT specifically identify yourself as a representative of Bethel, remember that those viewing your online postings may already know that you are from Bethel UMC. Therefore, the same responsibility to ensure that your postings are consistent with how you should present yourself with colleagues, parents, youth and as a representative of Bethel.
  - d) No last names, school names, addresses or phone numbers of children or youth should appear online postings. When contributing online, never post confidential Child or Youth information. When uploading digital photos to your social media sites, it is advisable not to post photos of our children or youth without their parents consent.

## **O. 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.

## VI. 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.
5. 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.
6. 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.
7. 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.
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 in-



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

## **VII. Policy Review and Approval**

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 Church 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 and signed by the Co-Chairs (Tara Lee & James D. Templeton)	Date
 	6/13/12
Approved for the Bethel Trustees and signed by the Chair (Ava Lee)	Date
	9/22/12
Adopted by the Administrative Council and Signed by Chair (Kirk James)	Date
	9/22/12