

Alaska United Methodist Conference

Safe Sanctuary Policy and Procedures For Children, Youth and Vulnerable Adults

Policy

In so far as the Alaska United Methodist Conference (AUMC) provides ministries to children, youth, and vulnerable adults, it is the policy of this conference to put in place procedures that will protect their safety and well being.

We believe the promise we make at baptism is one that we take seriously. When a child or adult is baptized we agree to do whatever we can to provide a community that will love them and help them to grow to be faithful disciples. Moreover, because we are baptized, we include all children, youth and vulnerable adults whether baptized or not.

Each local church and conference entity in the AUMC which works with children, youth and vulnerable adults shall prepare and send to the conference their policy and procedures for protecting children, youth and vulnerable adults. These policies shall be reviewed yearly and updates included in the charge conference reports for local churches. Each local church will need to adapt its policy to fit its church building, size and programs. Conference staff is available to resource local churches in writing policies and training.

Procedures

Safe Sanctuary

The term “Safe Sanctuary” refers to a program to protect children, youth and vulnerable adults from abuse, authored and published by Joy Melton and used by many United Methodist Churches. It includes simple, common-sense protective rules described below. This is also meant to protect staff and volunteers from unfounded accusations. Procedures for “Safe Sanctuary” should address at least the following topics.

Screening

Any adult who works with children, youth or vulnerable adults either as a volunteer or paid staff person shall be screened. The screening shall include a background check. This background check shall be a national search. It is recommended that someone be designated as the holder of information developed from these screenings. These shall be kept locked up so only the authorized person(s) shall have access.

Background screening shall be redone every other year to assure continued safety of all. The screening can be done through any of a number of resources. The conference office or website can be consulted for recommended services.

Screening shall also include having paid staff and volunteers fill out an application (samples can be found in the resource cited later in this document) to verify identity, address, employment history, experiences, prior church membership, personal references, permission to do the background screening and their signature affirming that the information provided is true.

Some churches introduce the Safe Sanctuary program as a part of new attendee/member classes. This allows the church to make all new persons aware that the church cares about protecting children, youth and vulnerable adults. It also gives the new participants the opportunity to be screened in the beginning if they think they might like to work with vulnerable persons.

Screening for driving records must be done on volunteers or staff who will be transporting children, youth or vulnerable adults. The screener will want to be concerned about the recent years of driving record. If as a young person an applicant had some trouble but is now long past those times, then he or she may be considered to be a safe driver.

See sample forms for gathering permission to do background screening on paid staff and volunteers in the book listed under Resources.

Review of Background Screening

A responsible party shall be designated as the person(s) who reviews background screenings. This person(s) should be someone who can be depended on to keep the information confidential and who can determine what information on a background screening is relevant and what information is not because it is too old or not applicable to the situation.

Computers and the internet make it very easy and quick to do national background screening of all kinds. Permission to do the screening should be kept in locked files. After the screening is done the person in

charge of making the background check may shred or black out sensitive information such as social security number, drivers license number, etc. The permission form should be kept on file until a new permission form has been signed for the next screening. The old form can then be destroyed.

Training

The conference shall provide training to all persons working with children, youth or vulnerable adults as requested. The training shall include but not be limited to: recognizing signs of abuse; avoiding situations when abuse might take place or conduct which might be perceived as abuse; reporting requirements of the state of Alaska and the Alaska United Methodist Conference related to abuse and media response procedures.

Group of Three Rule

A child, youth or vulnerable adult shall not be alone with another unrelated adult or child or youth or vulnerable adult. Ideally, everything should be done in groups of at least three: at least two adults and child, youth or vulnerable adult; or two children, youth or vulnerable adults and an adult. The ideal to strive for is two unrelated adults to be with those being protected at all times.

Counseling situations should be handled in such a manner that there is provision for private conversation but, if possible the participating persons should be in visual contact with others. Means of accomplishing this include having an open door, or window into the area of counseling, sitting outside in an area visible to others, or conducting the counseling in an area of a room away from others but still visible. If an adult is going to enter a counseling situation with a vulnerable person he or she should inform another adult.

Restrooms. The ideal situation is to have two adults accompany a child, youth or vulnerable adult to the restroom. If this is not possible another child, youth or vulnerable adult may accompany the supervising individual. The adult may also stand outside the restroom so he or she is not alone behind closed doors with the vulnerable person.

Riding In A Car. When transporting vulnerable participants, adults should make every effort not to be alone in the car with a child, youth or vulnerable adult. When dropping off or picking up vulnerable participants the route should be planned so two are dropped off last or picked up first if another responsible adult is not available. Caravanning is another

alternative when two cars are needed to transport but there are not enough adults for two adults per vehicle.

After Events. If an adult finds himself or herself in a situation where he or she is alone after an event with a child, youth or vulnerable adult, he or she should wait outdoors with the protected party until the protected party is picked up.

Showers. Adults and vulnerable participants at an overnight event should not shower together.

Age Differences

The Safe Sanctuary materials recommend a minimum five-year age difference between the oldest participant and the youngest leader at any event. The Alaska UM Conference also recommends this standard when the participants who are not leaders are children and youth. This protects the worker and the children and youth.

Under Eighteen Years of Age

Anyone under the age of 18 shall not be left in sole charge of children, youth or vulnerable adults. When a supervising adult over the age of 18 is present the under 18 worker and those vulnerable are protected.

Windows in All Classrooms

The ideal for classrooms is for each classroom to have a window, which may be in the door to the classroom. When this is not possible doors to classrooms shall be left open and someone shall be designated to walk by randomly to check on each classroom.

Cyber Safety

The world of computers, internet, and social networking is changing at a rapid pace. Churches and conference entities shall keep themselves up to date on what is happening and what is being recommended as best practices for safety of all involved. Children, youth and vulnerable adults shall be educated about internet safety. Permission shall be received in advance if pictures of children, youth or vulnerable adults are going to be used on the internet or in any media. When emailing be sure to "bcc" so that a recipient does not have access to each addressee's email. When computers are available some kind of a parental control management feature shall be used.

Convicted Abusers Attending Church

The internet makes available to the public names and locations of registered sex offenders. If someone in your church is a registered sex offender people in your church will be likely to find out because many parents are advised to check out the website to see if there are registered sex offenders in their neighborhoods.

Churches and conference entities are advised to check their church membership out on these websites and to be proactive if there is someone in your congregation who is a registered sex offender. We want to welcome both those who have been abused as well as those who have been abusers.

However, it is extremely important for the registered sex offender to be monitored while he or she is in your church building or facility where you have programming for children, youth and vulnerable adults. A team from the church (possibly pastor, trustee chair, SPRC chair...) should meet with the registered sex offender and develop a plan that will allow the offender to attend church for worship and other activities but that would restrict the offender from being anywhere in the building where he or she might be alone with children, youth or vulnerable adults.

Churches and conference entities should assign someone to monitor the offender's movements while he or she is in the church building or other facility. This may be in the form of a written agreement with the offender. For more information on how to handle this situation call the Director of Connectional Ministry or the Conference Superintendent.

See The Book of Resolutions of the United Methodist Church 2008, as Resolution 8009.

Educating the Congregation

The Alaska Conference shall regularly offer training to local churches and individuals. It is recommended that local churches develop a plan to educate their congregation, including children, youth and vulnerable adults on Safe Sanctuary. It is also recommended that the church find a way to celebrate when their policy is written, approved and filed with the conference office.

Reporting of Incidents

A plan for responding to allegations of abuse shall be established. The book, Safe Sanctuary has a chapter devoted to this. Those working with children, youth and vulnerable adults shall be aware of the state laws for reporting abuse. They shall also put together a plan to respond to the spiritual needs of those involved. Faithful response to the victim will include taking the allegation seriously and respecting the victim's privacy.

It is recommended that conference authorities (superintendent or the presiding bishop) be notified as soon as allegations of abuse are received.

The conference has a plan in the journal for responding to clergy abuse which should be followed if the pastor is the accused abuser (AUMC 2009 Journal, p113, Paragraph C. Guidelines for Dealing with the Abuse of Power and Authority of the Clergy Office in Areas Relating to Clergy Sexual Misconduct).

Media Communications

A plan for responding to the media shall be put in place. This plan should include who will be designated to speak to the media. The conference staff that has had crisis communication training can be consulted for advice on a plan as well as at the time of a crisis.

Resources

Recommended resources for writing, reviewing and implementing policy and procedures for Safe Sanctuary include:

Safe Sanctuary: Reducing the Risk of Abuse in the Church for Children and Youth written by Joy Thornburg Melton, Copyright 2008 Disciples Resources. *This book includes many other resources for information and training – including a list of videos.*

Safe Sanctuary DVD

Book of Discipline 2008

Paragraph 226 Care of Children and Youth (Baptism of children and youth).

Paragraph 226.4 (Duty of pastor, parents, officers, teachers and congregations to children of the church).

Book of Resolutions 2008

Paragraph 161: Resolution 2044, p. 135 Sexual Misconduct within Ministerial Relationships

Paragraph 162: Resolution 3021, p 192 Abuse of Older Adults

Paragraph 162: Resolution 3084, pp. 245-247 Reducing the Risk of Child Sexual Abuse

Resolution 8009, pp. 919-921 Church Participation by a Registered Child Sex Offender.

Policy and Procedure Review

This policy shall be reviewed yearly and any changes brought to the AUMC Annual Conference for approval.

Alaska Conference Safe Sanctuary Committee

Leila Disburg, Director of Connectional Ministry, attended Safe Sanctuary training years ago in Iowa and in Nashville November 2009, has experience writing a number of church policies.

Judith Goodrum, St. John UMC member, Attended Safe Sanctuary training in Nashville November 2009.

Kris Ann Wilcox, clergy on family leave, Unalaska, attended Safe Sanctuary training and has had extensive experience writing policies for church.

Laura Skiba, clergy North Star UMC, Nikiski, Chair of Conference Youth Council.

Abbe Dunning Newbury, Alaska Conference Chancellor, member of Chugiak UMC, worked on their safe sanctuary policy and was invaluable as the conference policy and procedures were written.

Lonnie Brooks, Alaska Conference Lay Leader and member of East Anchorage UMC. Lonnie's work in the denomination is extensive and invaluable as the conference policy and procedures were written.