

“A Safe Place”

CHILD AND YOUTH PROTECTION POLICIES AND PROCEDURES

PORTAGE CHAPEL HILL UNITED METHODIST CHURCH
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BIBLICAL AND THEOLOGICAL REFLECTIONS

“They will neither harm nor destroy in all my holy mountain...” (Isaiah 11:9)

The Kingdom of God is described in a variety of ways throughout the Bible, perhaps none so picturesquely and with so much vivid imagery as in the book of Isaiah, Chapter 11. It is a beautiful and harmonious scene, culminating in the above quote. This passage describes God’s creation generally, and human creation specifically.

The prophet points to God’s intention for the redemption of the world. The biblical story is the history of salvation. God creates a perfect place where human beings live in harmony with one another and with God. Being human, though, we tear at the fabric of relationships formed of covenant promise. Abuse of another person is the very antithesis of covenant living. A gut-wrenching word, a physical strike, a sexual violation, all serve to devalue the full-personhood which is the very Image of God in each of us.

The biblical record realistically portrays the presence and results of abuse among the people of God (for example, the story of Amnon and Tamar in II Samuel 13). Studies and statistics today show that the occurrences of abuse among those living within the faith community are not significantly different than those living outside of that community. Where such abuse is perpetrated by spiritual leaders within a congregation, there is not only a terrible perversion of power, but also results in enormous spiritual damage.

Even so, the Body of Christ is called to proclaim hope in the midst of despair...and work diligently to secure the fruit of that hope. As Jesus was the embodiment of righteousness, justice, peace, reconciliation and love, so the church, his body incarnate today, is called.

The church is responsible for becoming a safe place that confronts sin, those actions and attitudes that separate us from the will of God. Abuse is sin. The church seeks to bring healing to its victims and help to its perpetrators; and it consciously works for the prevention of all abuse.

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I. INTRODUCTION

Portage Chapel Hill United Methodist Church recognizing the implications of our commitment to Christ is seeking to ensure that the church is *maintained* as a safe, secure place where professional staff, teachers, leaders, or helpers minister appropriately to the manifold needs and concerns in the world about us. *We are aware of the possibility of abusers infiltrating the church's programs or of unintentional harm occurring to children.* To that end we at Portage Chapel Hill United Methodist Church of Portage, Michigan recognize the need for a written policy regarding child protection and the prevention of child abuse. Accordingly, we have adopted the following policy, which, among other things, establishes *the* policy and procedures for addressing allegations of abuse and establishes guidelines that will help prevent such abuse.

II. STATEMENT OF PURPOSE

We, the Task Force on Personal Safety for Children, Youth, and Adults with Special Needs at Portage Chapel Hill United Methodist Church, believe that we have a moral responsibility to put a policy into place that will ensure that each person within the care of our ministry can develop within a safe, spiritual and loving Christian environment without the unwanted intrusion of abuse.

The goals of this policy are:

- To provide a safe place to worship and to participate in church related activities.
- To safeguard and protect children, youth and adults with special needs from abuse.
- To protect staff and volunteers from wrongful accusations.
- To protect the integrity of our ministry.
- To provide a commonly embraced code of conduct for all workers.

While no policy can guarantee that abuse will not occur, we believe that having safeguards in place can reduce the chance of abuse. Those safeguards are:

- PCHUMC making reasonable efforts to screen out potential workers having inappropriate backgrounds or qualifications.
- Avoiding situations where abuse could possibly take place.
- Establishing procedures for reporting claims of abuse.

We choose to act rather than react in the area of abuse prevention. Our choice to be pro-active in the area of abuse prevention has resulted in the development of this policy.

In as much as no policy can anticipate all contingencies inherent in the life of a vital church, exceptions to adult participant eligibility in the education and care programs of Portage Chapel Hill UMC must be rare and limited to matters of application process time. When a pastor, staff member, or responsible volunteer must use an adult who has not been cleared by the Safe Place process, the member will be able to work in a room or setting with children, provided they work in the presence of a Safe Place certified member. That person must have turned in the application and a background check must be completed.

This policy is an “evolving” document. We will periodically review this policy to ensure that it is up to date and workable.

III. TERMS

A. Abuse: The term Abuse will refer to, but is not limited to, physical abuse, physical neglect, sexual abuse, sexual harassment, and emotional abuse as described below and as defined by P.A. 1975, No. 238 (“Child Protection Law”) and any amendments thereto.

1. **Physical Abuse**

Any *non-accidental* act that results in physical pain or injury to a child, youth, or adult with special needs—whether or not it leaves a cut or wound, or a mark or a bruise. Physically abusive behavior ranges from slapping, pushing, shoving, punching, kicking, and biting to more severe forms like choking, severe spanking, beating, hitting with object, burning, stabbing and shooting. In other words, physical abuse is any intentional means of inflicting pain or injury to another person. It is sometimes a single event, but can also be a chronic pattern of behavior.

2. **Physical Neglect**

Intentionally not doing what one is supposed to be doing to meet the physical needs of someone in his or her care. Neglect interferes with or prevents the normal development of a child, youth, or adult with special needs.

3. **Sexual Abuse**

The exploitation of, or any sexual intimacy forced on a child, youth, or adult with special needs for the sexual stimulation or gratification of another person. Child sexual abuse can refer to taking advantage of a child, youth, or adult with special needs who is not capable of understanding sexual acts or resisting coercion such as threats or offers of gifts.

4. **Sexual Harassment**

Sexual harassment shall include, but not be limited to, inappropriate sexually oriented humor or language; questions or comments about sexual behavior or orientation; unwelcome or undesired physical contact; inappropriate comments about clothing or physical appearance; or repeated requests for social engagements. Sexual abuse involving physical contact includes: fondling of body parts such as breasts, crotch, buttocks, or sexual organs; intercourse; oral and anal sex.

Sexual harassment also includes the display of sexual material in such a way as to embarrass or intimidate persons; and inappropriate and unwelcome self-disclosure regarding details of one’s own sexual behavior or history.

5. **Emotional Abuse**

Attempting to control a child, youth, or adult with special needs through words, threats and fear; destroying a child, youth, or adult with special needs’ self-worth through harassment, threats, and deprivation. Emotional abuse weakens children, youth, and adults with special needs mental and physical ability to resist, cuts off his or her contacts with others, and causes a gradual loss of self-esteem, all of which reinforce a sense of helplessness and dependence on the abuser.

B. Abuse Response Committee (ARC): A three-member committee to be nominated by the Leadership Selection and Development Committee and elected by the PCHUMC Charge Conference. The responsibility of the ARC Committee is to respond to accusations of abuse as referred by the senior pastor.

C. Accused: The person alleged to have engaged in abuse.

D. Accuser: The person alleged to have been abused, the parent or representative of such person, or the person allegedly to have witnessed abuse.

E. Adult with Special Needs: A person 18 years of age or older who is mentally or physically impaired, or incapacitated.

F. Adult Worker: (must be 18 years or older, and at least five years older than the oldest minor in the group). Any employee of, or approved adult volunteer, for an activity sponsored by PCHUMC.

G. Applicant: Anyone seeking to be a worker.

H. Child: Infant through 5th grade inclusive.

I. Employee: Any worker who is compensated for their activities at PCHUMC.

J. Helper: An adult/youth volunteer who has *secondary* authority.

K. Off Campus: Outside of the buildings and off of the contiguous grounds of PCHUMC.

L. One to One Contact: Contact between a child, youth, or adult with special needs and a worker, which takes place in private.

M. Parent: Includes legal guardian, and upon written permission, the parent's designee.

N. Pastoral Staff: A licensed, commissioned, or ordained person employed by PCHUMC.

O. PCHUMC: Portage Chapel Hill United Methodist Church facility, its related ministries, contiguous improvements, parsonage and grounds.

P. Professional Staff: Any paid employee of PCHUMC including pastoral staff.

Q. Teacher/Leader: A worker who has primary authority. *A youth leader must be 25 years or older.*

R. Volunteer: A worker who is not compensated for their activities by PCHUMC.

S. Youth: 6th grade through 12th grade inclusive.

IV. POLICIES ON ABUSE PREVENTION

A. Prohibition of Abuse

Abuse, as defined in Section IV of this policy, is prohibited in the congregation and programs of PCHUMC. This prohibition applies to all workers in the context of church programs, activities, and community involvement on behalf of the church.

B. Screening

Background screening will be performed for the express purpose of assuring the safety of all parties. There is not, nor shall there be, any intent to intrude into personal issues which are not relevant to the protection of children, youth, and adults with special needs. The scope of the screening will be limited to issues that affect a child's safety, especially child abuse and assaultive behavior. The results of the screening will be stored in electronic format in a secure location by the Office Administrator. The list of approved workers must be obtained from the Director of Education. The extent of screening is detailed in the following chart:

	Application	Interview	References	Criminal History
Professional Staff	X	X	X	X
Teachers, Leaders, & Helpers of Children, Youth, & Adults with Special Needs	X	X	X	X

In the event that an applicant/worker has been convicted of, or pled guilty or Nolo Contendere to, a charge alleging abuse, or has a criminal history evidencing assaultive behavior, that person shall be ineligible for any paid or volunteer position at PCHUMC within the scope of this document. In addition, PCHUMC reserves the right to refuse or postpone employment, either paid or volunteer. The "Sexual Offender Registry" shall be checked periodically (at least once a year).

C. Compliance

All professional staff and teachers, leaders and helpers must agree in writing to comply with this policy. A worker who refuses to agree to follow the policy or who violates the policy relinquishes their responsibility as a worker.

D. Training

Within the period of a year, prior to or after beginning church employment or volunteer work, all workers will participate in training provided by PCHUMC.

The purpose of training is to equip workers to recognize the signs of abuse and to know appropriate responses so that church premises and programs will be safe environments. Attendance at training sessions is mandatory.

If the worker has received an equivalent level of training from another organization or judicatory, PCHUMC may accept a written statement from an authorized leader attesting to the training.

E. Discipline Policy

Introduction

First and foremost, “discipline” is that which teaches. It is rooted in the same etymology as “disciple.” Thus, what we ought to be about in discipline is the building of disciples! Correction is about teaching young persons what discipleship looks like. Our methods, then, must be consistent with the life of a disciple; else we send mixed messages!

Children and youth engage in behaviors that adults find unacceptable and contrary to their wishes. These behaviors occur in church-sponsored programs as well as in the family home. When these behaviors occur in church-sponsored programs, however, it is often a church worker who must intervene, especially when the child/youth is under his or her supervision. An adult can interrupt or stop an unacceptable behavior by teaching the child/youth which behaviors are acceptable and which behaviors are not. By example and over time, the adult teaches the child/youth how to behave in a socially acceptable way and in a manner that is Christ-like...the manner of a disciple!

In the life of the church, physical restraint or physical methods of correction shall not be used except in extreme cases where risk of physical injury is imminent. Separation from the class, or “Time Out” shall be used if verbal discipline is ineffective. In the event behavior that disrupts the learning of the rest of the class continues, leadership staff and parent(s) shall be brought in for consultation. Dismissal from class shall be an absolute last resort.

Some examples of excessive or abusive discipline are listed below.

Abusive Physical Discipline (corporal punishment)

- Slapping, kicking, punching, hitting, choking, pushing, shoving, hair-pulling, twisting, pinching.
- Discipline that leaves a bruise, mark, wound, or cut.
- Discipline administered with any device or object (such as a paddle, spoon, stick, or book).
- Discipline followed by a request/threat to the *child/youth* not to tell anyone what happened, not to report the discipline, or not to show anyone a mark or bruise.

Abusive Verbal Discipline

- Shouting or yelling, threatening, hurling insults or obscenities.
- Discipline that is intended to humiliate a *child/youth*.
- Discipline by refusing to speak to a *child/youth*.
- Discipline that involves bribery, coercion, or threats.
- Discipline followed by a request/threat to the child not to tell anyone what happened, not to report the discipline.

Discipline Procedures

- Corporal punishment (slapping, hitting, pushing) is not permitted.
- Abusive verbal discipline (e.g., yelling, hurling insults, threatening) is not permitted.
- Parent(s) are to be informed and involved whenever a *child/youth* misbehaves beyond minor correction, or does not respond to discipline.
- Concerns about a *child's/youth's* behavior or the appropriate response to a *child's/youth's* behavior will be reported to the program supervisor.
- A helper or a parent will be involved in classrooms where behavior is an ongoing problem.
- Expectations for a *child's/youth's* behavior must reflect his or her age and level of comprehension. Similarly, discipline must reflect his or her age and level of comprehension.
- Children *are to be* reminded of the kind of behavior that is acceptable for the setting. Older *children/youth* will benefit from having these expectations in written form.
- Appropriate forms of discipline are to be shared with workers once each year. Periodic reminders are to be given as needed.
- Whenever possible, leaders will try to avoid having to discipline a *child/youth* by choosing one or more of the following options:
 - Distract the *child/youth* with another activity.
 - Help the *child/youth* focus on another more acceptable behavior.
 - Isolate the *child/youth* from others if another volunteer/staff is available to assist.
 - For young children, time-outs will not last longer (in minutes) than the age of the child. For example, a three-year old will not have to sit for a time-out any longer than three minutes.
 - When nothing seems to be working, the worker will get help before “losing his/her cool.”

F. Code of Conduct

General

- A parent is responsible for providing transportation for his/her child to and from church functions or activities, unless the parent provides written, electronic, or verbal (telephone) permission for his/her child for alternate transportation. Verbal permission must be witnessed by two adult persons and documented.
- Two non-related adult workers/helpers must be present during the transportation of a *child/youth* in a vehicle.
- Workers shall be required to treat coworkers and *children/youth* with dignity and respect at all times.
- The conversation of all workers shall be wholesome and edifying. There shall not be any obscenity, inappropriate sexual talk, off-color jokes, coarse language, or sexual innuendo. Such conversation will not be condoned.
- Music, songs, skits, games and other group activities shall be free of off-color jokes, coarse language, and sexual innuendo.
- No alcoholic beverage, other recreational drug, or substance intended to alter mood or function shall be permitted at any PCHUMC function. Prescription medications shall be for the sole use of the person named in the prescription.
- No pornographic or obscene literature, websites, social media, or other material of said nature will be permitted at any PCHUMC activity. (Note: educational materials approved by the Education or Curriculum Committees that discuss such topics may be used in educational programs or classes.)
- Humor should be used with care. It will be used in ways that are edifying and not at the expense of another's self-esteem.
- Physical contact between workers and *children/youth* will be engaged in with care so as to avoid any appearance of impropriety. Physical contact must never take place in private.
- *Observed violation of the Code of Conduct by any worker must be reported to a member of the professional staff to be referred to the pastoral staff.*
- Any worker found in the violation of the Code of Conduct may be asked to resign from their involvement from the ministry.
- Any worker under investigation for a criminal violation of the Code of Conduct will be suspended until the disposition of the investigation.

Nursery Programs

- At least two non-related workers will serve in the nursery whenever it is scheduled. Two related workers may serve, if a third unrelated worker is present.
- Workers may not take children from the nursery. Any significant medical problem must be reported immediately to the child's parent(s) utilizing PCHUMC's beeper system.
- Whenever possible, only workers of the same sex will accompany or assist a child using a restroom. A child using a restroom shall occupy the restroom alone unless assistance is required (e.g., handicapped, toddlers, etc.). For children who require assistance, the adult worker must assist the child with the bathroom door ajar. The diapering of an infant or toddler must take place in the nursery room under the general observation of another worker. For children who do not require assistance in the bathroom, an adult worker must remain outside the bathroom.
- An adult or minor who is not scheduled as a nursery worker for that particular activity may not spend time in the nursery room. A parent may check on his/her child at any time. A parent may be in the nursery for an extended time only with permission of the adult worker.
- The Discipline Policy applies to nursery programs.

Enrichment Time, Sunday School, Vacation Bible School, or similar programs.

- At least two non-related workers will serve in the classroom or program area whenever it is scheduled. Two related workers may serve, if a third unrelated worker is present.
- Unless there is a planned activity outside the classroom, children must not leave the classroom unless they become ill, need to use the bathroom or for any other compelling reason.
- If *practicable*, only workers of the same sex will accompany or assist a child using a restroom. A child using a restroom shall occupy the restroom alone unless assistance is required (e.g., handicapped, toddlers, etc.). For children who require assistance, the adult worker must assist the child with the bathroom door ajar.
- This Discipline Policy applies to Enrichment Time, Sunday School, Vacation Bible School, or similar programs.

Youth Group

- Each year youth group leaders will include abuse-related topics in the curriculum for members of the youth group.
- At least one parent shall sign Form D before a *child/youth* may participate in any function or activity and before permitting the participation of any *child/youth* in any overnight function or activity off church grounds. A copy of Form D: On Site Activities Consent and Release Form is attached to the policy and is available on the PCHUMC's web page.
- A youth group leader must be 25 years or older. Regardless of the relative ages, it is never acceptable for a youth group leader and a youth group member to date each other.
- At least two non-related youth group leaders must be present, providing appropriate and sufficient supervision, at all youth functions.
- While the appropriate display of affection is often part of conveying support and encouragement to one another, such displays can be misinterpreted. Appropriate displays of affection between youth leader and youth must be limited to such actions as a brief hug, an arm around the shoulders, an open-hand pat on the back, a handclasp or handshake, or a light touch to the forearm. Restrict displays to a public area. A youth group leader or member's right to refuse such a display of affection will be respected.
- No gifts or communication of an intimate personal nature will be directed to a youth by a youth group leader. Leaders who deal with youth may, where appropriate, engage in one to one counseling with the youth. Obviously, by its very nature, one to one counseling is a sensitive matter, often conducted in private. Before engaging in one to one counseling, leaders must be cognizant of the potential for problems and take all steps possible to avoid the appearance of impropriety. Leaders will, if possible and appropriate, advise the youth's parents that such counseling may occur. If, at the worker's discretion, the youth's parents must not be advised that one to one counseling may occur, the leader must advise his/her immediate supervisor that such counseling may occur.
- One to one sessions with a youth must be observable by the parent of the youth or by a second adult who is not related to the leader.
- On overnight trips, a leader shall not sleep in a room, tent, camper, or other facility with any single youth not his/her own child.
- At least two non-related leaders must be present at or before the time that any function or activity is scheduled to begin. At least two leaders shall remain present at the conclusion of the activity until all youth are picked up by their parent or otherwise leave the activity.

V. REPORTING REQUIREMENTS

A. Any individual who has received an allegation or suspects that a violation of the code of conduct has occurred during a PCHUMC-sponsored activity must contact a member of the PCHUMC professional staff immediately and then file a written report. The written report must be submitted to the senior pastor within twenty-four hours. All individuals must maintain confidentiality, talking only with professional staff and investigators.

B. The professional staff person who has received the aforementioned allegation must complete Form B: Report Form for Suspected Incidents of Child Abuse. This document will be kept confidential. In addition, this document will be kept separate from any worker records of the accused and disclosed only pursuant to mandatory reporting requirements.

C. If the alleged violation is of a criminal nature, the senior pastor must notify the authorities immediately and then follow the *prescribed* legal procedure. PCHUMC will not take any further action regarding the accusation until such time as the investigation has been conducted.

D. If the alleged violation is of a non-criminal nature, the senior pastor must contact the ARC within 48 hours. At the discretion of the senior pastor and in consultation with the ARC, the senior pastor may then choose to convene the ARC and complete Form C: Recommended Initial Steps for the Abuse Response Committee.

E. No one, except the senior pastor and legal counsel for PCHUMC, has authority to speak on behalf of PCHUMC concerning any accusation of abuse. In the event that the senior pastor is accused, the district superintendent shall assume the senior pastor's role as far as this policy is concerned.