

703-06 CHILD AND YOUTH ABUSE AND PREVENTION POLICY

(Passed on Second Consent Calendar in Plenary on June 9, 2005)

Introduction

WHEREAS, the General Conference of The United Methodist Church. In April, 1996, adopted a resolution aimed at reducing the risk of child sexual abuse in the church. The adopted resolution includes the following statement:

Jesus said, "Whoever welcomes [a] child... welcomes me." (Matthew 18:5). Children are our present and our future, our hope, our teachers, our inspiration. They are full participants in the life of the church and in the realm of God.

Jesus also said, "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). Our Christian faith calls us to offer both hospitality and protection to the little ones, the children. The Social Principles of The United Methodist Church state that "...children must be protected from economic, physical, and sexual exploitation, and abuse."

Tragically, churches have not always been safe places for children. Child sexual abuse, exploitation and ritual abuse (ritual abuse refers to abusive acts committed as part of ceremonies or rites; ritual abusers are often related to cults, or pretend to be) occur in churches, both large and small, urban and rural. The problem cuts across all economic, cultural and racial lines. It is real, and it appears to be increasing. Most annual conferences can cite specific incidents of child sexual abuse and exploitation in their churches. Virtually every congregation has among its members adult survivors of early sexual trauma.

Such incidents are devastating to all who are involved: the children, the family, the local church and its leaders. Increasingly, churches are torn apart by legal, emotional, and monetary consequences of litigation following allegations of abuse.

God calls us to make our churches safe places, protecting children and other vulnerable persons from sexual and ritual abuse. God calls us to create communities of faith where children and adults grow safe and strong.

Book of Resolutions of the United Methodist Church 1996, pages 384-386

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, that the Northern Illinois Conference of The United Methodist Church adopts this policy for the prevention of child abuse in our conference ministries:

Purpose

Our Conference's purpose for establishing this Child and Youth Protection Policy is to demonstrate our absolute and unwavering commitment to the physical safety and spiritual growth of all our children and youth, and to reduce the risk of abuse occurring in our conference ministries.

Statement of Covenant

As a Christian community of faith, and an Annual Conference of the United Methodist Church, we pledge to conduct the ministry of the gospel in ways that assure the safety and spiritual growth of all our children and youth, as well as the safety and spiritual growth of those person who work with children and youth.

- We follow reasonable safety measures in the selection and recruitment of workers.
- We implement prudent operational procedures in all programs and events.
- We educate our workers with children and youth regarding the use of all appropriate policies and methods, including first aid and methods of discipline.
- We have clearly defined procedures for reporting a suspected incident of abuse that conforms to the requirements of the laws of the State of Illinois. Our volunteers and paid staff are instructed to report all suspected incidents of abuse.
- We prepare to respond to media inquiries if an incident occurs.
- We inform parents of our policies, provide training for our workers with children and youth, and provide forums for learning concerning these issues for our congregations, our clergy, our conference level staff, our local church staffs, and the public.

Conclusion

In all our ministries with children and youth, the Northern Illinois Conference of The United Methodist Church is committed to demonstrating the love of Jesus Christ through the provision of safe and sacred places where children and youth may learn and grow in faith.

THEREFORE, BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that the Conference Children's Ministry Council and the Conference Safe Sanctuaries Task Force develop appropriate procedures concerning the following areas:

- Response of teachers, leaders, or other child and/or youth workers who witness or suspect an incident of child abuse
- Primary response to an allegation of child abuse
- Confidentiality
- Safety procedures
- Interim amending of the policy

THEREFORE, BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that the Conference Children's Ministry Council and the Conference Safe sanctuaries Task Force submit the procedures to the 2006 session of the Annual Conference for the purpose of perfecting and adopting the procedures.

THEREFORE, BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that all conference level events offering child care between this session of the Annual Conference and the 2006 session of the Annual Conference work in consultation with the Conference session of the Annual Conference work in consultation with the Conference Children's Ministry Council and the Conference Safe Sanctuaries Task Force in providing appropriate care for the safety of children and youth entrusted to their supervision in child care settings.

THEREFORE, BE IT FINALLY RESOLVED, that all conference level events working with children and youth (beyond the provision of child care) meet the requirement for child and youth workers and the safety procedures presently in place and used by the Northern Illinois Conference Office of Outdoor and Retreat Ministries.

Conference Safe Sanctuaries Task Force,
Daniel Diss and Jean Bush