**ALDERSGATE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH**

**North Reading, Massachusetts**

**ABUSE PREVENTION POLICY FOR CHILDREN AND VULNERABLE ADULTS**

# “Safe Sanctuaries”

**Purpose:** This congregation’s purpose for establishing a Child & Vulnerable Adult Abuse Prevention Policy is to demonstrate our absolute and unwavering commitment to the physical safety and spiritual growth of all our children, vulnerable adults, and other participants. This policy sets minimum requirements for our congregation and also sets goals toward which we agree to reach.

**Background:** The General Conference of the United Methodist Church in 1996 adopted a policy aimed at reducing the risk of child sexual abuse. Recently, the New England Conference has recommended that vulnerable adults be added to the category of those at risk. Our local congregation, acting as a community of faith, adopts the following policy aimed at preventing such abuse within our church.

**Authorization:** The Charge Conference, acting as an All Church Conference, adopts this policy for the guidance of (1) all congregation members; (2) those members upon whom fall specific duties and responsibilities relating to children and vulnerable adults; and (3) for the administration of this policy.

**Definitions**

* + - A “**Child”** for purposes of this policy is an individual between birth and 16 years of age, whether a church member, a participant in a church activity, a guest, or a visitor.
* A"**Teacher**" means a church school teacher or aide, a nursery caregiver, a helper, a youth group leader or advisor, a choir leader, or anyone else taking a leadership role in a children's activity, lay or clergy.
  + A“**Rover**” means an adult who spends his or her time wandering throughout the classroom area, periodically observing the interaction between the teacher(s) and children in the classroom. The rover may be called upon to locate a parent or member of the Oversight Committee to help address a disruptive classroom situation.
  + A **“Monitor”** means a male rover, who also checks the men’s bathroom and keeps eyes on any known sex offenders present during worship.
* **“Abuse”** under this policy involves an act or omission (the failure to act) which results in physical or emotional injury to a child. There are three varieties:

1. **Physical** – the non-accidental infliction of injury.
2. **Sexual** – the touching of a sexual part of the body in an inappropriate manner.
3. **Emotional** – improper verbal and/or non-verbal conduct which results in serious state of anxiety, fear, depression, or withdrawal.

* **“Neglect”** is the failure to provide one or more of the necessities essential for the physical and emotional well being of a child.

**Oversight Committee**

An Oversight Committee consisting of at least three (3) persons shall administer this policy. The committee shall consist of both men and women. The Pastor and the Chair of Pastor Parish Committee shall be members. The Church Council shall appoint the third person. Spouses and/or family members shall not serve together on this Committee. Duties shall include:

1. Administering review of application forms.
2. Obtaining background checks, which include Criminal Background Checks and Sex Offender information, for the positions specified below in the “Personnel Selection” action. Assistance and information may be obtained from the local Police Department. This duty includes obtaining available fee exemptions or making other concrete financial arrangements for any fees.
3. Training personnel and any interested participants.
4. Posting this policy in a visible, public place and/or on the church web site.
5. Coordinating with the Trustees any necessary improvement of facilities to execute this policy.
6. Investigating and reporting incidents.
7. Initiating improvements to this policy.
8. Such other duties as may be required in adhering to both the spirit and letter of this policy.

**Official Spokesperson**

This Committee shall designate one of its members, or another person (subject to the approval of the Church Council), as the official spokesperson to respond to internal or external requests for information about any incident. This spokesperson shall use any and all available information to prepare for this important function.

**Personnel Selection**

***All Formal Leaders*** – paid or volunteer, clergy or non-clergy – who work with children or vulnerable adults shall adhere to the following procedure. Formal leaders are Clergy, Sunday School Superintendents, Teachers (as defined above), and Youth Leaders.

* Leaders must be members or friends of the church who have attended the church for no fewer than six (6) months and who are known by the church family and Oversight Committee. Persons appointed by the Conference shall be exempt from these requirements **only if** the Pastor Parish Relations Committee has received a statement from the Conference that a review meeting these criteria has been conducted by them.
* The application forms for both paid and non-paid leaders required by this Policy shall have been completed and submitted to the Oversight Committee. Forms are included with this Policy.
* Background checks specified by this policy shall have been accomplished. Application and other forms to provide information needed for these checks are included with this policy.

* Occasional volunteers, such as one-time chaperones, drivers, etc. are exempt unless they perform in such capacity more than three (3) times in any calendar year.

**Training**

The Oversight Committee shall ensure that training of leaders and other workers (including parents participating in the programs) covered by this policy is conducted annually concurrent with the beginning of our Christian Education year. All parents shall be invited to participate and to offer suggestions. Training shall consist of:

* The requirements of this policy and relevant Conference and legal reporting requirements.
* First-Aid and location of safety equipment such as fire extinguishers, etc. CPR Training will be conducted as time and funds allow.
* Guidance for disciplining children and ensuring the safety of children and vulnerable adults.
* Review of this policy and any additions or changes for all Sunday School teachers and youth leaders
* Review of monitor and/or rover duties

**Physical Facilities**

Our goal is to ensure that physical interference with observation of classes and activities is removed or is maintained at the minimum level consistent with appropriate privacy.

* Doors will remain open (at a minimum), or
* Glass will be installed in doors (goal). (The sliding door between the kitchen and sanctuary and all restroom doors are exempt).

**Staffing**

Our plan is to staff all classes and activities in accordance with the following:

1. As a goal two adults in attendance in all rooms or activities at all times.
2. When two adults are not available, then an adult rover (as defined above) or monitor will make random, unannounced inspections of all rooms and activities.
3. Teenagers should not normally staff activities, but if they do, then rover or monitor inspections should be made more frequently.
4. A “rule of three”--defined as two unrelated adults and one child or one adult and two unrelated children—should be followed at all times. No teacher should place himself or herself in a compromising situation by being alone with a child, out of the sight of others. No teacher shall be alone with a child in the bathroom for purposes of toileting, clean up from craft, art, or cooking projects, or care of illness or injury, unless the bathroom door is left open and others are in the vicinity. In situations that require a personal conference, the meeting is to be conducted in view of others.

Notwithstanding the above, there may be times when the classrooms are not supervised. During non-worship intergenerational events, staffing is not typically provided. Therefore, during these events, no one under age 14 shall enter any classroom or unsupervised area unaccompanied by an adult. Parents shall be responsible for enforcing this.

**Reporting Incidents**

Incidents of abuse or possible abuse, as well as neglect, in our programs shall be reported immediately, **after ensuring the safety or care of the victim**. Borderline situations which are not clearly abusive should be made known so that appropriate corrective action may be taken to prevent future harm. Any person observing questionable actions should report them to the Oversight Committee.

Leaders – Pastor, Superintendent, Teachers, and those regularly working with children – are

mandated by law to report incidents to DSS and local authorities. Each mandated reporter observing the incident must file a separate report irrespective of what any other does. Reports to the Oversight Committee are also **strongly encouraged.** A full list for reporting follows:

1. The immediate family members of the victim.

2. Department of Social Services (DSS) 24 –hotline (800-792-5200) immediately.

3. Written report to DSS, 22 Pleasant Street, Malden, MA 02148, within 48 hours.

4. Local Police Department Child Abuse or Sex Offender Officer.

5. The Oversight Committee.

6. The District Superintendent and Bishop’s office.

7. The Church’s insurance agent.

8. The Church’s attorney.

**All Reports Will Be Taken Seriously.** In some cases – especially those in which no clear act has been witnessed – the Oversight Committee has the authority to investigate and to separately determine whether or not it is to be reported. In some cases, only clarification of policy or appropriate behavior may be warranted. **IF IN DOUBT – REPORT**. All reports are confidential and will be reviewed and investigated – but not all reports will result in action. For example, even if the Committee has no first hand knowledge (other than a report), it should report it to the DSS, etc. Reports from multiple sources ARE encouraged and in some cases required (e.g., for leaders with knowledge of the incident). Some observers may bring a matter to the Committee’s attention on the basis of strict anonymity. They should be informed that anonymous reports are accepted, and that the Committee’s report to DSS, etc. CAN state that the original reporter wishes to remain anonymous. ***Remember: mandated reporters MUST report creditable reports, even if anonymous***.

Until the investigation is completed, the accused may be instructed to refrain from church activities as determined by the Oversight Committee. ***All information gathered in the investigation of suspected abuse cases will be kept strictly confidential to maintain the privacy of all involved.***

Should a report involve a member of an Oversight Committee or his or her family, that member shall

not participate on the Committee until after the case has been resolved. The Church Council may appoint an interim member at its discretion. If any member of the Committee disagrees with action taken on any report or with any other member actively participating in a case than the situation shall immediately be appealed to the District Superintendent for resolutions.

All reports shall be treated as **confidential**. Reports records and other forms related to the administration of this procedure shall be safeguarded.

In the course of investigation, the Oversight Committee shall use proper discretion at all times. The Committee shall NOT pry or delve deeply into a child’s or vulnerable adult’s story. If that is felt to be necessary, the case is to be reported and professionals called in immediately. The Committee should investigate to the extent needed to determine how to proceed, how to improve safety and security, and to determine what changes in policy or guidelines might be appropriate.

**Oversight and Review of this Policy**

The Committee shall submit changes and improvements to this policy to the Church Council as needed. The committee has the authority to initiate and suggest improvements involving safety by working through other Committees (such as Trustees) if the problem is an immediate safety issue.

Any church member, parent, leader, etc. may recommend changes to this policy through either the Oversight Committee or the Church Council.

The Committee is responsible for ensuring all reports to legal authorities, Conference Officers, etc. are made as required and appropriate. The Oversight Committee may seek legal assistance from the Church’s attorney, but because of the financial implications must clear this action through the Church Council and the Church’s insurance company.

This policy may be reviewed and provisionally amended by the Church Council at any time. The full policy, including any Church Council interim amendments, will be reviewed and re-approved by the Charge Conference at least every two (2) years.

**Appendix**

Employment application

Volunteer application

Consent for CORI/SORI background check

Limited Access Covenant