



Child Abuse Prevention and Child Protection Policy

Socastee United Methodist Church

Since 2007, churches in the South Carolina Conference of the United Methodist Church have sought to provide and implement Safe Sanctuaries practices. Each local church must maintain a Safe Sanctuaries policy and review it annually. The 2016 General Conference of the United Methodist Church adopted a resolution aimed at reducing the risk of child sexual abuse in the church:

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 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, emotional and sexual exploitation and abuse."

Tragically, churches have not always been safe places for children. Child sexual abuse, exploitation, and ritual abuse (abusive acts committed as part of ceremonies or rites, often related to cults or pretend to be) occur in churches 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 within churches. Virtually every congregation has among its members the adult survivors of early sexual trauma.

Such incidents are devastating to all who are involved: the child, the family, the local church and its leaders. Increasingly, churches are torn apart by the 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.

— The Book of Resolutions of The United Methodist Church

Thus, in covenant with all United Methodist congregations, Socastee United Methodist Church adopts this policy for the prevention of child abuse in our church:

I. Purpose

The purpose for establishing this Child Abuse Prevention Policy and accompanying procedures is to demonstrate our total and unwavering commitment to the physical, emotional and spiritual safety of all of our children, youth and vulnerable adults.

II. Covenant Statement

Socastee United Methodist Church hereby pledges to conduct the ministry of Jesus Christ in ways that assure the physical and emotional safety and spiritual growth of all of our children, youth and vulnerable adults – as well as all of our workers with children, youth and vulnerable adults. We will follow reasonable safety measures when selecting and recruiting workers; we will implement appropriate operational procedures in all areas of programming and care; we will train our workers with children, youth and vulnerable adults on our procedures and policies; and we will have a clearly defined procedure for reporting a suspected incident of abuse consistent with South Carolina state law.

III. Theological Reflection

We adopt this policy in accordance with the statement we as a congregation make at each baptism – that we will “nurture children and youth in the Christian faith and life and include them in our care.” With this policy, we renew our baptismal pledge to “live according to the example of Christ” and surround children and youth with a “community of love and forgiveness, that they may grow in their trust of God, and be thus confirmed and strengthened in the way that leads to life eternal.” (*Baptismal Covenant II, United Methodist Book of Worship*).

IV. Volunteer and Staff Recruitment and Selection Guidelines

- A. **Age** – Volunteers and paid staff who work with children, youth and vulnerable adults in any position of authority must be at least 21 years of age and at least 5 years older than the age of the persons they are working to serve.
- B. **Church affiliation** – Volunteers and paid staff who work with children, youth and vulnerable adults must have been an active participant in regular worship (attending at least two Sundays each month).
- C. **Working with children, youth and vulnerable adults** – A satisfactory background check must be completed before volunteers and paid staff work with children, youth and vulnerable adults in the church.
- D. **Application** – Applicants must complete and sign an application form (staff) or information form (volunteers) and the related waivers giving permission to check references and background information.
- E. **Reference Checks** – Church leaders will check three references for each primary worker. The references will be performed by phone, by mail or in person.
- F. **Background Checks** – Criminal background checks will be made of all clergy, paid staff and volunteers who have supervisory program responsibility for youth (e.g. youth group leaders) and all other church employees.

- G. **Prior Convictions** – Individuals who have been convicted of physical or sexual abuse or neglect may not work in any church-sponsored activity or program for children, youth and vulnerable adults. Individuals who have been convicted of financial crimes will not work with money. Individuals who have been convicted of DUI in the past 5 years will not drive persons of any age.
- H. **Interview** – All applicants may be interviewed for suitability for the work they desire to do. Interviews will be conducted by the leader of the program in which the applicant will work, or by persons designated by the program leader. A team of interviewers may be used. Church policy and guidelines should be discussed during the interview.
- I. **Child Abuse Survivor Applicants** – Adult survivors of childhood physical or sexual abuse need the love and acceptance of this church family. A person's experience with abuse and their recovery process may be pertinent to their suitability as ministry workers with children, youth and vulnerable adults. Applicants who are survivors of abuse should discuss this in confidence with the person who conducts the confidential interview. If an applicant is uncomfortable doing so, he or she may have the interview conducted by a pastor.
- J. **Confidentiality of Information** – The church will keep confidential all information received in the applicant selection process. Selection information will be marked as such and stored in a locked location with limited access only by church staff and others with a need to know.
- K. **Required Forms and Signatures** – In addition to staff application and reference forms, all applicants will sign an "Authorization and Request for Criminal Background Check" form.

V. Staff Supervision Guidelines

- A. **Two-adult rule** – Two non-related adults will be present during classroom activities, activities away from church facilities, and when transporting children, youth and vulnerable adults. If this is not possible, at least one adult will be assigned as a "rover" to walk the halls and regularly look in on teachers and the groups they are leading. Whenever possible, teachers will be assigned in teams of two or more per Sunday School hour to every class of children, youth and vulnerable adults. When feasible, both male and female leaders should be present. If the group stays overnight at the church, or if a church-sponsored group leaves the premises, two or more leaders will be present and will include at least one male and one female, if the group is mixed gender.
- B. **Nursery Procedure** – All legal guardians using the church nursery will observe proper check-in and checkout procedures.
- C. **Open-Door Policy** – Further protection for children, youth and vulnerable adults requires that an open-door policy be followed. The legal guardian of the children served, clergy, administrative and professional staff of the church have the right to visit unannounced and observe any children's or youth activity, classroom or church-sponsored program at any time.
- D. **Outside Access** – There must be access to a telephone or cell phone when a group is at or away from the church facility. The church office or an authorized church representative will be given this number prior to a group's departure from church property.
- E. **Doors and Windows** – All classroom and office doors will have a window or visibility from the hallway, or will remain open while occupied. Windows will be kept free from

adornment, and exterior windows will be locked at all times. Doors without visibility from the outside will be replaced with doors with windows when replacement is needed.

- F. **Individual Counseling** – One-on-one interactions with children, youth and vulnerable adults are sometimes necessary and appropriate, but care must be taken that they be conducted in an environment that provides visibility by other adults. If at all possible, another adult is to have knowledge of staff members' whereabouts and with whom they are meeting. All incidents of suspected abuse and neglect revealed during the session will be reported in accordance with Section VI of this policy.
- G. **Outings Away From Church Property** – Legal guardians of all children and youth participating in out-of-town and overnight outings must sign a written consent form and a notarized medical release form, both of which may be completed for a one-year period, but must be renewed annually. In no circumstance is one adult to take a child or children on an overnight outing alone. On youth overnight outings, a 1-to-7 staff-to-youth supervision ratio will be observed. Female staff will supervise female youth in their sleeping quarters, and male staff will supervise male youth. Married couples will observe the female/female and male/male sleeping arrangements. With the exception of a legal guardian/child combination, a staff and youth will not occupy the same bed or sleeping bag.
- H. **Gifts** – Volunteers and paid staff who work with children, youth and vulnerable adults will not give gifts to individual children, youth and vulnerable adults. Because gift-giving can be a form of buying loyalty or silence, gift-giving should be done on a group basis and only on special occasions. Gifts should be modest and appropriate to the occasion.
- I. **Training** – Prior to working with children, youth and vulnerable adults, workers must undergo child protection safety training. The Safe Sanctuaries policy will be evaluated every year, and training will be offered to persons working with children, youth and vulnerable adults. The training will be extended to Church Council members, SPRC, Trustees and paid staff.
- J. **Verification of Reading of Policy Statement** – Upon receipt of this policy statement, volunteers and paid staff who work with children, youth and vulnerable adults will read and sign a statement confirming that he or she has read the Child Abuse Prevention Policy.

VI. Response By Church Workers To Allegations of Abuse

If a suspected incident of abuse or neglect occurs at the church or is revealed to a volunteer or paid staff person at a church-sponsored activity, the following steps will be taken:

- A. The adult in charge of the activity will:
 - a. Ensure the safety of the child, youth or vulnerable adult and tend to his or her immediate needs, as the situation dictates.
 - b. Inform the pastor.
 - c. Fill out an Incident Report.
 - d. The pastor will:
 - 1. Contact the family

2. Immediately remove the accused from further involvement with children, youth and vulnerable adults – with dignity and respect for the sacred worth of the person.
3. Inform the district superintendent and the church's insurance company.
4. Determine, in consultation with the district superintendent, what to tell key church leaders and the congregation and devise a plan to help the church move forward.
5. Consult with the conference communications coordinator for assistance in dealing with media inquiries and preparing statements.
6. Act as the only point of contact for any media inquiries, or designate one other person to do so. All other church staff and volunteers will refer any media requests to the pastor or his or her designee.

- B. The person who initially reported the suspected incident of abuse or neglect, or to whom the allegation was revealed, will call the appropriate local law enforcement agency.

If the pastor is suspected or accused of sexual misconduct or abuse, these steps will be taken:

- C. The safety of the victim of the alleged misconduct or abuse will be ensured, and his or her immediate needs will be tended to, as the situation dictates.
- D. The person who initially reported the alleged misconduct or abuse, or to whom the allegation was revealed, will:
 - a. Inform the Staff-Parish Relations Committee chairperson.
 - b. In cases involving alleged abuse, call the appropriate local law enforcement agency.
- E. The SPRC chairperson will inform the district superintendent.
- F. The district superintendent will inform the bishop and, in consultation with the SPRC chairperson, they will decide whether the pastor will be removed from the pulpit until the investigation is completed and resolved.
- G. The bishop may activate the Conference Response Team to help the church with next steps.

VII. Conclusion

In all of our ministries with children, youth and vulnerable adults, this congregation is committed to demonstrating the love of Jesus Christ so that each child, youth and vulnerable adult will be "surrounded by steadfast love...established in the faith, and confirmed and strengthened in the way that leads to life eternal." (*Baptismal Covenant II, United Methodist Book of Worship*)



Internet and Social Media Policy

Incredible ministry can take place using modern technology but, as with all forms of ministry, there are inherent risks involved with the use of electronic communications. Following these procedures can minimize those risks, and adults working with children and youth will be instructed in their use.

Obtain permission from a parent or guardian

In addition to general permission to participate in a church ministry, adults working with children and youth will obtain written parental permission in advance before:

- Posting photos and videos of participants on any church website and social media, or sharing photos and videos in any way, including but not limited to email, text message and messaging apps.
- Communicating directly with an individual child or youth (beyond overall group messaging) in any way, including but not limited to phone, email, text message and messaging apps.
- Sharing any participant's full name or contact information.

Guidelines for communication with children and youth

- If communicating by email, place email addresses in the BCC (blind carbon copy) field so recipients see only their own address when a message is received.
- All information will be delivered as a group or with a parent copied. There will be no one-on-one conversation between an adult and a youth.
- Conduct all communication in a professional manner.
- If a child, youth or vulnerable adult shares an individual communication with an adult, the adult should preserve the communication so it can be reviewed later, should the need arise.

Safety measures for using social media

- Set privacy settings to limit who can see your profile.
- Do not submit a "friend request" to a child or youth; do not accept a "friend request" from a child or youth.
- Avoid relationships with children and youth via social networking sites, unless an actual relationship (ministry, family friendship, etc.) already exists.
- Do not post anything on social media that you would not publish in a church bulletin or newsletter.
- Educate children and youth about these guidelines, and encourage them to follow them.

Safety measures for sharing photos electronically

- Obtain permission to use photos.
- Refrain from using names or identifiable information.
- On social media, tag only adults.

Administration of official church social media

- Each social media account or group will have a minimum of two unrelated administrators who are either church leaders or adult volunteers engaged in the ministry.
- Social media will be monitored frequently to allow for quick responses in the event urgent or crisis concerns are posted.
- Examine photos for vulnerable/compromising situations and make sure they uphold your mission.
- Any inappropriate material posted to church social media or group will be deleted and addressed.



Incident Report

(Please print)

Socastee United Methodist Church

Date of incident: _____ Time of incident: _____

Children, youth or vulnerable adults involved (use back of form, if needed):

<u>Name</u>	<u>Age</u>	<u>Address</u>	<u>Parent/guardian</u>
_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____

Location of incident: _____

Names of persons who witnessed the event (use back of form, if needed):

<u>Name</u>	<u>Phone number</u>	<u>Name</u>	<u>Phone number</u>
_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____

Describe event and actions taken (use back of form, if needed): _____

By signing this form, I attest that it contains a true and accurate account of the incident described.

Name: _____ Signature: _____ Date: _____
(print)

This report was submitted to: _____



Child/Youth Medical and Legal Release

Socastee United Methodist Church

Please print legibly.

Student

Full legal name: _____

Social Security number: _____ Date of birth: _____

Home address: _____

Cell phone number: _____

Parents or legal guardians

Names: _____

Address (if different from student): _____

Phone number(s): _____

Email address(es): _____

Emergency contacts

List two people (other than parents/guardians) who may be contacted in the event of an emergency:

Name: _____

Phone number: _____

Relationship to student: _____

Name: _____

Phone number: _____

Relationship to student: _____

Insurance information

Insurance company: _____ Policy number: _____

Address: _____

Name of insured: _____

Medical and allergy information

Allergies: _____

List all medications being taken (prescription and over-the-counter): _____

Does an adult need to monitor the medication? Yes ☐ No ☐ (If yes, please attach instructions)

Any other significant information: _____

Medical consent

I give my consent for church staff, adult volunteers and qualified medical personnel to act on my behalf in securing and administering necessary medical care and treatment for my child.

Parent/guardian signature: _____ Date: _____



Children and Youth Code of Conduct

Socastee United Methodist Church

All children and youth participating in any church ministry must:

- Respect church staff persons, adult volunteers, peers and property.
- Observe curfew and quiet hours.
- Inform a church staff person or adult volunteer of their location at all times.
- Always be in a group of at least three people and never pair off as a couple.
- Have a church staff person or adult volunteer present when girls and boys are together in a room, other than a common room.
- Show no public or private displays of affection.
- Not possess or use alcohol, illegal drugs, tobacco, firearms, weapons or flammable devices.
- Dress in an appropriate manner.
- Wear seatbelts when transported.

Children and youth who do not adhere to these expectations might suffer consequences to be determined by the church staff person or adult volunteer present at that time. Consequences can include calling parents, missing a free-time activity, remaining with a church staff person or adult volunteer, completing an assigned task, or being provided optional clothes to wear (in the case of inappropriate dress).

If the offense is more serious, children and youth might be asked not to attend future events or trips and parent or guardian might be called to take home the child/youth.

If called and so requested, parent(s) and/or guardian agree to come and pick up their youth.

My child and I have read the Children and Youth Code of Conduct, and we acknowledge these expectations. We agree with the Code of Conduct and we are aware of the consequences if my child does not adhere to it. In addition, we do not hold church staff persons or adult volunteers personally responsible for any injuries that may occur while attending an event.

Parent/guardian signature: _____ Date: _____

Child/youth signature: _____ Date: _____



Volunteer Information Form

Socastee United Methodist Church

Name: _____

Address: _____

Phone: _____ Email: _____

Previous volunteer experience: _____

Previous work experience: _____

How many hours per week are you available to volunteer? _____

I can volunteer (check all that apply): Days _____ Evenings _____ Weekends _____

Why would you like to work with children in our ministry? _____

What qualities do you have that would help you work with children? _____

What are your hobbies? _____

Would you be available for periodic training sessions? Yes _____ No _____

By signing below, I certify that my answers are true and complete to the best of my knowledge. My signature also represents my consent to an investigation of my background and qualifications. I understand that I may withhold my permission and that, in such a case, no investigation will be done, and my request to volunteer will not be processed further.

Volunteer signature: _____ Date: _____

NOTE: Volunteer Background Form must be attached to this form.



Volunteer Background Form

Socastee United Methodist Church

Have you ever been charged, convicted of, or pleaded guilty to a crime, either a misdemeanor or a felony (including but not limited to drug-related charges, child abuse, other crimes of violence, theft or motor vehicle violations)?

Yes _____ No _____

If yes, please explain fully: _____

Have you ever been exposed to an incident of child abuse or neglect?

Yes _____ No _____

If yes, how did you feel about the incident? _____

Name: _____

Address: _____

Phone: _____ Date of birth: _____

Social Security #: _____ Driver's license #: _____

Driving background (if needed): _____

NOTE: Volunteer Information Form must be attached to this form.



References Form

Socastee United Methodist Church

List three personal references (people not related to you by blood or marriage)
and provide a complete address and phone information for each.
References are confidential.

Name: _____

Address: _____

Daytime phone: _____ Evening phone: _____

Relationship to volunteer: _____

Name: _____

Address: _____

Daytime phone: _____ Evening phone: _____

Relationship to volunteer: _____

Name: _____

Address: _____

Daytime phone: _____ Evening phone: _____

Relationship to volunteer: _____

By signing below, I certify that my answers are true and complete to the best of my knowledge. My signature also represents my consent to an investigation of my background and qualifications. I understand that I may withhold my permission and that, in such a case, no investigation will be done, and my request to volunteer will not be processed further.

Volunteer: _____ Date: _____
(signature)

Church officials:

Staff-Parish Chairperson: _____ Date: _____
(signature)

Pastor: _____ Date: _____
(signature)



Photo/Video Permission Form

Socastee United Methodist Church would like your permission to post photos and videos of your child on the church website and social media channels.

Please check below to designate which permission(s) you grant, and complete the form as indicated.

☐ I give permission to post photos and videos of my child **individually** on the church website and social media channels, based on the guidelines provided.

☐ I give permission to post photos and videos of my child **as part of a group** on the church website and social media channels, based on the guidelines provided.

☐ I do not give permission to post photos and videos of my child, individually or as part of a group, on the church website and social media channels.

Name of child: _____
(please print)

Name of parent/guardian: _____
(please print)

Signature of parent/guardian: _____

Date: _____



Media Release Form

In consideration for my appearance in productions at Socastee United Methodist Church, the undersigned hereby assigns to Socastee United Methodist Church all rights to the use of my voice and/or likeness in the publication, distribution, transmission and display of any such picture, film, videotape, photographic reproduction (including associated soundtrack), illustration, advertisement, television program, videotape program, internet broadcast or digital file transfer (or any other medium now existing or developed in the future) of such image, voice or likeness, and of any prints or copies thereof or therefrom, in whole or in part, at the sole discretion of Socastee United Methodist Church and/or its successors or assigns, in perpetuity, worldwide.

Name (printed)

Signature

Date

Address

In the case of a minor, a parent/guardian's signature is required:

I hereby, individually and as parent/guardian of the above named minor, consent to the foregoing.

Parent/guardian name (printed)

Parent/guardian signature

Date



Response Process

If a suspected incident of abuse or neglect occurs at Socastee United Methodist Church, or is revealed to a staff person or adult volunteer at a church-sponsored activity, these actions will be taken:

- The adult in charge of the activity will:
 - Ensure the safety of the child, youth or vulnerable adult and tend to his or her immediate needs, as the situation dictates.
 - Inform the pastor.
 - Fill out an incident report.
- The pastor will:
 - Contact the family.
 - Immediately remove the accused from further involvement with children, youth and vulnerable adults – with dignity and respect for the sacred worth of the person.
 - Inform the district superintendent and the church's insurance company.
 - In consultation with the district superintendent and key church leaders, will determine if any information about the alleged incident is shared with the congregation and, if so, how much and when.
 - Determine, in consultation with the district superintendent, what to tell key church leaders and the congregation and devise a plan to help the church move forward.
 - Consult with the conference communications coordinator for assistance in dealing with media inquiries and preparing statements.
 - Act as the only point of contact for any media inquiries, or designate one other person to do so. All other church staff and volunteers will refer any media requests to the pastor or his or her designee.
- The person who initially reported the suspected incident of abuse or neglect, or to whom the allegation was revealed, will call the appropriate local law enforcement agency.

If a pastor is suspected or accused of sexual misconduct or abuse, the following actions will be taken:

- If the pastor is suspected or accused of sexual misconduct or abuse, these steps will be taken:
 - The safety of the victim of the alleged misconduct or abuse will be ensured, and his or her immediate needs will be tended to, as the situation dictates.
 - The person who initially reported the alleged misconduct or abuse, or to whom the allegation was revealed, will:
 - Inform the Staff-Parish Relations Committee chairperson.
 - In cases of alleged abuse, call the appropriate local law enforcement agency.
 - The SPRC chairperson will inform the district superintendent.
 - The district superintendent will inform the bishop and, in consultation with the SPRC chairperson, they will decide whether the pastor will be removed from the pulpit until the investigation is completed and resolved.
 - The bishop may authorize the Conference Response Team to help the church with next steps.

LOCAL UNITED METHODIST CHURCH POLICY STATEMENT ON MISCONDUCT OF A SEXUAL NATURE

Socastee United Methodist Church affirms the 2016 Book of Resolutions, Sexual Abuse Within the Ministerial Relationship and Sexual Harassment Within the Church, which states that sexual abuse within the ministerial relationship and sexual harassment within the church as incompatible with biblical teachings of hospitality, justice and healing. In accordance with the 2016 Book of Discipline ¶161F, all human beings, both male and female, are created in the image of God, and thus have been made equal in Christ. As the promise of Galatians 3:26-29, states all are one in Christ, we support equity among all persons without regard to ethnicity, situation, or gender.

Sexual abuse within the ministerial relationship occurs when a person within a ministerial role of leadership (pastor, educator, counselor, youth leader or other position of leadership) engages in sexual contact or sexualized behavior with a congregant, client, employee, student, staff member, co-worker or volunteer.

Sexual harassment is any unwanted sexual advance or demand, either verbal or physical that is reasonably perceived by the recipient as demeaning, intimidating, or coercive. Sexual harassment includes, but is not limited to, the creation of a hostile or abusive working environment resulting from discrimination on the basis of gender (2016 Book of Discipline ¶161J).

Sexual abuse within the ministerial relationship involves a betrayal of sacred trust, a violation of the ministerial role and exploitation of those who are vulnerable. Similarly, sexual harassment must be understood as an exploitation of a power relationship rather than as an exclusively sexual issue.

Misconduct of a sexual nature within the life of the Church interferes with its moral mission.

Socastee United Methodist Church stands in opposition to the sin of misconduct of a sexual nature in the Church and society at large and commits itself to fair and expedient investigation of any charge of sexual misconduct within the church and to take action deemed appropriate and in compliance with the Book of Discipline.

Further, Socastee United Methodist Church bears affirmative responsibility to create an environment of hospitality for all persons, male or female, which is free of misconduct of a sexual nature and encourages respect, equality and kinship in Christ.

Some instances of sexual harassment can be resolved easily and informally between the parties. In all other instances, misconduct of a sexual nature should be reported to the chair of the Staff-Parish Relations Committee and the pastor in charge. If the conduct involves a clergy person, it should be reported to the district superintendent or the presiding bishop.

reviewed/no changes 9/12/2024
Date approved: _____

Church Council chairperson signature: Mary Anne M. Wilson Campbell