
**Orange United Methodist Church
Child and Youth Protection Policy****INTRODUCTION**

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.

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 churched, 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 adult survivors of early sexual trauma.

Such incidents are devastating to all who are involved: the child, the family, the 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 church a safe place, 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. (From The Book of Resolutions of The United Methodist Church - 2000, pp. 180-181. Copyright 2000 by The United Methodist Publishing House. Used by permission.)

PURPOSE

Our congregation's purpose for establishing this Child and Youth Protection Policy is to demonstrate our absolute and unwavering commitment to the physical, mental, and emotional safety and spiritual growth of all our children and youth.

STATEMENT OF COVENANT

Therefore, as a Christian community of faith and a United Methodist congregation, we pledge to conduct ministry in ways that provide safety and spiritual growth for all of our children and youth as well as for all the people who work with children and youth. We will follow reasonable safety measures in the selection and recruitment of workers, we will implement prudent operational procedures in all programs and events, we will educate all our workers with children and youth regarding the use of appropriate policies and methods (including first aid and methods of discipline), we will have a clearly defined procedure for reporting a suspected incident of abuse that conforms to the requirements of state law, and we will be prepared to respond to media inquiries of an incident occurs.

CONCLUSION

In all of our ministries with children and youth, this congregation is committed to demonstrating the love of Jesus Christ so that each child 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 Hymnal, p. 44)

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In order to provide a safe and fulfilling environment for the children and youth attending Orange United Methodist Church, the following policy has been established.

- Volunteers and employees working with children and youth will complete a Child and Youth Worker Information Sheet, as well as, Consent to Release Confidential Information Form. The Orange staff person responsible for the corresponding area of ministry shall contact the listed references and complete a Reference Contact Form. When the policy guidelines indicate, the affected ministry area staff person shall request a criminal records check on the respective child/youth worker. Completed information sheets, consent forms and reference contact forms shall be forwarded to the church administrator for filing.
- All volunteers must be involved with Orange Church for a minimum of 6 months before they can hold a leadership position. Leadership position is defined as the persons responsible for the activity or event.
- Church sponsored programs, event, or ministry involving children and youth, requires no fewer than two adults present at all times in isolated areas. People under 18 can assist an adult, but can not be substituted for an adult.
- Childcare for leadership/committee meetings is the responsibility of the parent(s). Childcare can occur on church grounds provided that the parent(s) makes the arrangement ahead of time and covers any cost involved.
- In the nursery, the attending child worker will receive children into their respective room. The parent /guardian shall at that time register the children on the form provided. The worker shall issue a pager to the parent to contact if needed. The parent shall return the pager when they pick up their child.
- Leaders of youth ministry should be a minimum of five years older than the oldest youth.
- At any counseling sessions with children or youth, the doors on the room used should remain open for the entire session, ideally when others are nearby even though not in listening distance.
- Written parental/guardian permission is required for off church property activities, retreats, and overnight activities.
- In order to assure proper attention is given to an injury or accident involving a child/ youth, an Incident Report Form is to be completed by the adult supervisor at the time of the incident. Injuries requiring medical treatment (Band-aids, cleaning or any other first aid) shall be verbally reported to the parents/ guardians, and the church office within 2 hours. Injuries requiring EMS notification are to be verbally reported immediately. An Incident Report Form is to be kept 5 years in a confidential file.
- Suspicious behavior on the part of any child/youth worker should be reported immediately to an appropriate Orange staff person. While respecting the rights and reputation of the accused, the Orange staff person will confront the accused regarding his/her observed behavior. If deemed necessary, the accused will be removed immediately from work with children and youth, until further investigation. In the event of an allegation of abuse or neglect, the accused shall be immediately removed from any further work with children and youth. The victim and their family shall receive immediate ministry from the church. The incident shall be reported to the appropriate authorities. The accused shall be offered appropriate ministry from the church.