

# **Safe Sanctuary Policy and Procedures**

Version: Jan 2010

Centerport United Methodist Church  
97 Little Neck Road  
Centerport, NY 11721  
631 261-5222

*Prepared by*  
Staff Parish Relations Team

## Safe Sanctuary Policy and Procedures

### **Purpose**

1. To guide Centerport United Methodist Church (“CUMC”) and its youth related programs in providing a caring and secure environment for children in all phases of church life.
2. To help CUMC reduce its risk and liability exposure.
3. To protect staff, both paid and volunteer, from false allegations.

### **Biblical Foundation**

CUMC seeks to express God’s love of children and provide for their personal wholeness. As a caring community, we seek to prevent abuse of any form to our children and youth. The Bible is the foundation to our understanding upon which all policies, procedures, and ministries are developed.

Jesus teaches us explicitly that children have the right and the keys to the Kingdom of God. He demonstrated this through his teachings. Our goal in response to this Biblical mandate is to maintain a safe, secure and loving place where children may grow, and a place where caregivers, teachers and leaders (both paid and volunteer) can minister appropriately to their needs.

In order to be faithful to God’s will, the 1996 General Conference adopted a resolution aimed at reducing the potential risk of child abuse in the church. In the spring of 2008, the CUMC Staff Parish Relations Team (“SPR”) developed a “Safe Sanctuary” policy and procedures to:

- Acknowledge the risk of child abuse and develop a policy to prevent it.
- Implement steps to prevent harm to our children and workers.
- Continue to provide ministry to the children and provide a safe and secure place in which the children may experience the abiding love of God and fellowship in the community of faith.

### **Scope**

This policy shall apply to all current and future workers, compensated and/or volunteer, who will have the responsibility of supervising, directing, coordinating, teaching and/or assisting the activities of preschoolers, children, and youth. This policy shall provide a procedure to address alleged acts of child abuse and conform to applicable state law.

## **Code of Good Practice**

1. Plan the work of the Church so as to minimize situations where the potential for abuse of children and young people can occur.
2. Appoint a suitable person as a Safe Sanctuary Coordinator (“SSC”) for the Safety and Protection of Children and Young People. At CUMC, the chair of the SPR shall be deemed the SSC.
3. Implement Safe Sanctuary Policy and Procedures to protect children and young people.
4. Give all paid staff, (MYF, Sunday School, etc.) and volunteers clear guidelines.
5. Use supervision as a means of protecting children and young people.
6. Require paid staff and all volunteers to complete an Employment Application, Criminal Records Authorization Form, and Code of Ethics form.
7. For a paid position, verify at least two references by persons not-related to the applicant that have knowledge of the applicant’s ability/work history with children or young people.
8. Verify paid applicant’s work history with last two employers or last 10 years of experience and verify highest level of education attained.
9. Verify if paid applicant has any conviction for criminal offenses, including offenses against children or young people.
10. Require paid/volunteer applicants to complete an Employee/Volunteer Screening Form and Code of Ethics form.
11. Require all teen volunteers to review and sign code of ethics acknowledgment.
12. Require all paid and volunteer staff to read and sign they received the CUMC’s Safe Sanctuary Policy and Procedures.
13. All paid and voluntary positions are subject to the successful completion of a probationary period of 180 days.

## **New York's Child Abuse Law**

Mandated reporting – New York State and the New York Annual Conference mandate that there is no discretion in this matter. Anyone with knowledge of child abuse must report it. Any staff person or church school teacher shall immediately report their knowledge of child abuse to the Pastor and/or SSC.

### **Definition**

Child abuse refers to an act committed by a parent, caregiver or person in a position of trust (even though he/she may not care for the child on a daily basis) which is not accidental and which harms or threatens to harm a child's physical or mental health or welfare. The following definitions and explanations in this section are from the New York Department of Social Services.

### **Types of Abuse**

#### **Physical Abuse**

A physical injury, threat of injury or creation of a real and significant danger of substantial risk of death, disfigurement or impairment of bodily functions. Such injury or threat of injury, regardless of intent, is inflicted or allowed to be inflicted by non-accidental means. Examples: asphyxiation; bone fracture; brain damage, skull fracture, subdural hematoma; burns, scalding; cuts, bruises, welts, abrasions; internal injuries, poisoning; sprains, dislocations; gunshot, stabbing wounds.

#### **Sexual Abuse**

Sexual abuse includes any act defined in the code of New York which is committed, or allowed to be committed, upon a child by his/her parent or other persons responsible for the child's care. Examples of such abuse are: sexual exploitation, sexual molestation, intercourse/sodomy, exposure to pornography, and other sexual abuse.

#### **Emotional / Mental Abuse**

A pattern of acts, or omissions, by the caretaker which result in harm to a child's psychological or emotional health or development.

#### **Ritual Abuse**

Abuse in which physical, sexual, or psychological violations of a child are inflicted regularly, intentionally, and in a stylized way by a person or persons responsible for the child's welfare.

#### **Neglect Abuse**

Abuse in which a person endangers a child's health, safety, or welfare through negligence.

## **Reducing the Risk of Child Abuse**

In an effort to create the safest possible environment within CUMC, several abuse prevention measures will be utilized. These measures include screening of paid and volunteer workers (including MYF drivers and retreat leaders) for past child abuse convictions, provisions to ensure staff awareness of policy and procedures in place to prevent child abuse, use of the two adult rule and where practical the use of open classrooms.

### **Six Month Rule**

The “Six Months Involvement Rule” requires all volunteers that work with children and youth be involved with CUMC for at least six months before they are allowed in position involving contact with minors.

### **Staff Screening**

All Paid Staff, Volunteer Staff and Teen Volunteers are required to read and sign that they received the CUMC Safe Sanctuary Policy & Procedures. They must also sign the Employee/Volunteer Screening Form. Anyone refusing to read or sign the above documents will not be permitted to serve.

#### **a. Paid Staff:**

Before beginning the first year of service, all paid staff must complete an Employment Application, Criminal Records Authorization Form, Employee/Volunteer Screening Form and Code of Ethics. Anyone who has a child abuse conviction, or refuses to complete the above documents, will not be permitted to work at CUMC.

#### **b. Volunteer Staff:**

Before beginning the first year of service, all volunteer staff must complete Criminal Records Authorization Form, and Code of Ethics form. Anyone Who has a child abuse conviction, or refuses to complete the above documents, will not be permitted to work at CUMC.

#### **c. Teen Volunteers:**

Before beginning the first year of service, all teen volunteers must read and sign the Code of Ethics.

Leaders of community groups of children or youth who use the church facilities will be required to read the CUMC Safe Sanctuary Policy and Procedures and sign the acknowledgment form. Church facilities will not be available to groups whose leaders refuse to read and sign the policy.

### **Two Adult Rule**

The 'Two Adult Rule' requires no fewer than two adults present at all times. Risk will be reduced more if the two adults are unrelated. Adults, either teacher or volunteer, (not a minor) will be assigned in teams of two or more to every class of children or youths. In Sunday school, a concerted effort will be made to recruit sufficient numbers of volunteer teachers to permit team teaching. Other church sponsored or community groups of children or youth who meet at the church should have two or more leaders present whenever possible. If the group stays overnight at the church, or if a church sponsored group leaves the premises overnight, two or more leaders must be present and must include at least one male and one female if the group is mixed gender.

### **Five Years Older Rule**

- d. Leaders of youth programs must be a minimum of five years older than the oldest youth.
- e. Persons under eighteen years of age may not supervise youth programs. They may assist a responsible adult, but will not be a substitute for an adult under the Two Adult Rule.

### **Classroom Discipline**

All teachers and workers will use the following discipline measures.

If a child is behaving inappropriately, the teacher or worker will tell the child specifically what he/she is doing that is not acceptable and state what the expected behavior is, e.g., "We do not throw the blocks, we use the blocks for building." If this measure is not effective, the child will be guided to another activity. If inappropriate behavior continues, the child may be placed at a table to work alone, away from the other students. If the child's disruptive behavior continues after these steps have been taken, the child shall be taken to the Nursery School Director or Sunday School Director and left under the supervision of that Director and adult volunteer. The Pastor will be advised if such action is/has been/or will be taken.

No physical punishment or verbal abuse, e.g., ridicule, are to be used at any time. If isolating the child within the classroom or removal of the child from the classroom becomes necessary, the situation will be discussed with the child's parents or guardian as soon as possible.

### **Open Classrooms**

Sunday school classrooms or child care rooms may be visited without prior notice by church staff and/or parents. Brief observations of child care rooms and classrooms of children or youth should be conducted by the Nursery School Director and Sunday School Director during school hours.

### **Open Door Counseling**

All counseling sessions with children or youth should be conducted with the door open to avoid the potential of false perceptions or accusations.

### **Parent and Family Education**

The Safe Sanctuary Policy and Procedures shall be posted throughout the building, available on CUMC website, and emailed to the congregation and the parents of the children and youth.

### **Reporting Child Abuse**

Should there be allegations of child abuse at CUMC these procedures must be followed:

1. Treat any allegation of child abuse seriously.
2. Pray for the church and all persons affected by the allegation.
3. If someone other than the pastor is the subject of the allegation, the Pastor and/or SSC should be notified immediately.
4. If the pastor is the subject of the allegation, the District Superintendent should be notified immediately by the SSC.
5. Any allegation of child abuse in the Nursery School shall be reported to the Nursery School Director.
6. Upon hearing a child make an accusation an adult immediately complete an Incident Report Form.

### **The Pastor and/or the SSC shall implement the following procedures:**

- a. Immediately begin documenting all procedures observed in the handling of the allegation.
  - b. Immediately notify the District Superintendent. According to the New York Annual Conference Policy on Sexual Misconduct, the District Superintendent will contact the Conference Response Team. The Response Team will send a representative to CUMC within 24 hours to conduct an investigation.
  - c. Immediately notify the parents.
  - d. Immediately notify the church's insurance company.
7. Do not confront the accused with the allegation unless and until advised by the District Superintendent to do so. If the accused has assigned duties within the life of the church, that person must be temporarily relieved of his/her duties until the investigation is concluded.

8. The pastor should extend whatever care and resources necessary, but under no circumstances should the pastor or any church leader or member investigate the allegation. In providing care to the principals (alleged victim and the accused) and their families, the pastor or church leader, should under no circumstances be drawn into a discussion of the truth or falsity of the allegation which could contaminate the investigation. Do not assign blame or take any steps that involve establishing or refuting the allegation.

9. It is appropriate to show care and comfort for the alleged victim. This should be the pastoral objective from the moment the allegation is received or otherwise made known.

10. Observe confidentiality for both the alleged victim and the accused until advised to the contrary by the District Superintendent.

### **Insurance**

The Church shall obtain a sufficient level of liability insurance coverage that are available and would cover child abuse and sexual misconduct claims. If available, the Church should have the levels of coverage which are required for limited immunity.

### **Policy Review**

The Child Abuse Policy and Procedures of CUMC shall be reviewed on a regular basis by the Church Council. A verification follow-up report will be made each year at Charge Conference to insure the integrity of the policy and procedures.

CENTERPORT UNITED METHODIST CHURCH  
CODE OF ETHICS

Thank you for volunteering or applying to work with CUMC to serve our children and youth. Your contribution is important and appreciated. We ask that everyone who works with our children and youth read and sign the following Code of Ethics. In light of past incidences within other organizations, CUMC felt it important to enact these policies to ensure the continued safety of our youth.

The Book of Resolutions for the United Methodist Church states that we support “methods of education designed to assist every child toward complete fulfillment as an individual person of worth”. Adults and older youth who work with our children and youth are in a position of stewardship, and play a key role in fostering spiritual development of both individuals and community. It is, therefore, especially important that those in leadership positions be well qualified to provide the special nurture, care and support that will enable children and youth to develop a positive sense of self and spirit of independence and responsibility.

The relationship between young people and their leaders must be one of mutual respect, if this positive potential is to be realized. There are no more important areas of growth than those of self-worth and the development of a healthy identity as a sexual being. Adults play a key role in assisting children and youth in these areas of growth.

Children, youth and adults can suffer damaging effects if leaders engage in inappropriate conduct with young persons in their care. Therefore, it is expected that leaders’ behavior will respect the worth and dignity of each child and youth. To this end, leaders must refrain from any activity that may be construed as sexual or abusive behavior with children and youth. They shall not engage in behavior with children or youth that constitutes verbal, emotional or physical abuse.

As a paid staff member or volunteer, you acknowledge by signing this statement that you understand and agree to comply with this Code of Ethics. By signing this Code of Ethics, you acknowledge having read and agree to be bound by the CUMC Safe Sanctuary Policy and to observe it when working with children and youth. In addition, you have completed the requested documents completely and truthfully. You also agree that in the event that you are arrested or charged in a court with any crime or offense involving a minor that you shall immediately notify the Pastor and/or your supervisor and suspend your activity with children and youth until the situation has been reviewed by the Staff Parish Team.

I acknowledge that I have read and understand the above statements of position, expectations and actions.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

CENTERPORT UNITED METHODIST CHURCH  
NURSERY SCHOOL VOLUNTEER CODE OF ETHICS

Thank you for volunteering to assist the CUMC Cooperative Nursery School. Your contribution is important and appreciated. We ask that everyone who works with our nursery school children read and sign the following Code of Ethics.

We support “methods of education designed to assist every child toward complete fulfillment as an individual person of worth”. Adults that assist with our children are in a position of stewardship, and play a key role in fostering positive development of both individuals and community. It is, therefore, especially important that those in leadership positions be able to provide a nurturing , caring and supportive environment that will enable children to develop a positive sense of self and spirit of independence and responsibility.

The relationship between children and their leaders must be one of mutual respect, if their positive potential is to be realized. There are no more important areas of growth than those of self-worth and the development of a healthy identity. Adults play a key role in assisting children in these areas of growth.

Children can suffer damaging effects if leaders engage in inappropriate conduct with children in their care. Therefore, it is expected that leaders’ behavior will respect the worth and dignity of each child. To this end, leaders must refrain from any activity that may be harmful or abusive to children. They shall not engage in behavior with children that constitutes verbal, emotional or physical abuse.

As a volunteer, you acknowledge by signing this statement that you understand and agree to comply with this Code of Ethics. By signing this Code of Ethics, you acknowledge having read and agree to be bound it.

I acknowledge that I have read and understand the above statements of position, expectations and actions and will comply with them.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date



**Centerport United Methodist Church Safe Sanctuary Policy  
Confidential Employee/Volunteer Screening Form**

**Screening Form for Employees/Faculty/Volunteers Working With Children or Youth.**

*We wish to ensure that our church is a safe and secure environment for all children and youth who participate in our programs and use our facilities. For this reason, we require that all volunteers who work with children or youth complete this form. Thank you for willingness to participate and for your cooperation in safeguarding the well being of our young people!*

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

Phone Number \_\_\_\_\_

**Have you ever been *convicted* of a misdemeanor or felony, including any child abuse related offense?**

Yes \_\_\_ No \_\_\_

If yes, please explain (use back of this form).

**Have you ever been *accused* of any child abuse related offense?**

Yes \_\_\_ No \_\_\_

If yes, please explain (use the back of this form).

**Worker's Statement**

The information contained in this form is correct to the best of my knowledge. I have read the Safe Sanctuary Policy and Procedures adopted by the Centerport United Methodist Church, and I agree to abide by said policy and all other rules of the church. I hereby release Centerport Methodist Church from all liability for damages resulting to me because of my compliance or non-compliance with its Safe Sanctuary Policy and Procedures.

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

THIS INFORMATION SHALL REMAIN CONFIDENTIAL AND WILL NOT BE  
DISCLOSED UNLESS REQUIRED BY LAW OR POLICY

**CHECKLIST FOR RESPONSE TO ALLEGATION OF PHYSICAL,  
EMOTIONAL, NEGLECT, RITUAL, AND SEXUAL ABUSE TO BE  
COMPLETED BY THE SAFE SANCTUARY COORDINATOR OR THE  
PASTOR AND SAFE SANCTUARY COORDINATOR**

In the case of an allegation of child/youth sexual abuse, if a person observes or receives information of an allegation, he/she is required by the Church to report the allegation. All allegations of child/youth sexual abuse shall be reported to the Pastor and/or the Safe Sanctuary Coordinator ("SSC"). The Pastor and/or SSC must complete the tasks listed below and date and initial as each step is completed. Note: If the allegation is against the Pastor, the report should go to the SSC and the District Superintendent.

1. Date: \_\_\_\_ Initials: \_\_\_\_ Ensure the person reporting the allegation immediately completes an Incident Report Form and delivers it to the Pastor and/or SSC.
2. Date: \_\_\_\_ Initials: \_\_\_\_ For clergy and paid staff: remove the accused from the situation and suspend the accused from duties involving children/youth.
3. Date: \_\_\_\_ Initials: \_\_\_\_ For volunteers: Remove the accused from the situation and suspend the accused. If the Pastor is not the direct supervisor of the accused, the Pastor will inform the supervisor as soon as possible to suspend the volunteer from duties involving children/youth.
4. Date: \_\_\_\_ Initials: \_\_\_\_ Request and collect written documentation of all conversations and actions taken. If the person reporting the allegation is a volunteer, both the volunteer and the clergy/professional staff to whom the volunteer reports will document all conversations and actions taken. Any further actions shall be handled by the Pastor and/or SSC, District Superintendent and Conference Response Team.
5. Date: \_\_\_\_ Initials: \_\_\_\_: Notify the District Superintendent and Conference Response Team.
6. Date: \_\_\_\_ Initials: \_\_\_\_: Notify the parents/guardians of the alleged victim and respond to their questions and concerns.
7. Date: \_\_\_\_ Initials: \_\_\_\_: Notify the church liability insurance carrier.
8. Date: \_\_\_\_ Initials: \_\_\_\_ Determine whether the incident requires immediate notification of state authorities.
9. Date: \_\_\_\_ Initials: \_\_\_\_ Document all persons contacted or with knowledge of the incident and actions taken to this point.
10. Date: \_\_\_\_ Initials: \_\_\_\_: Cooperate with legal and state authorities in their investigations, if any.
11. Date: \_\_\_\_ Initials: \_\_\_\_ Pastor shall begin pastoral care process with the alleged victim and family.
12. Date: \_\_\_\_ Initials: \_\_\_\_ Refer all media inquires to District Superintendent and Conference Response Team.
13. Date: \_\_\_\_ Initials: \_\_\_\_ Inform all volunteer(s) and staff of the need for confidentiality.
14. Date: \_\_\_\_ Initials: \_\_\_\_ Consider and respond to the concerns of other parents.
15. Date: \_\_\_\_ Initials: \_\_\_\_ Update written documentation of persons contacted and action taken.

**INCIDENT REPORT FORM**  
(TO BE COMPLETED BY THE PERSON(S) REPORTING THE INCIDENT)

Reason for report \_\_\_\_\_

Date of incident \_\_\_\_\_ Class \_\_\_\_\_

Title \_\_\_\_\_

Name(s) and Age(s) of Minor(s) \_\_\_\_\_

Quote the child's first words verbatim: \_\_\_\_\_

Briefly describe what happened: \_\_\_\_\_

What action did you take? \_\_\_\_\_

What action did others take, if any (specify who)? \_\_\_\_\_

Has the incident been resolved? \_\_\_yes \_\_\_no Explain: \_\_\_\_\_

Were there any witnesses? \_\_\_yes \_\_\_no Names: \_\_\_\_\_

Signatures of witnesses (if possible): \_\_\_\_\_

Report submitted to: \_\_\_\_\_