

POLICY STATEMENT FOR THE PROTECTION OF CHILDREN, YOUTH AND VULNERABLE ADULTS

Royal Oak First United Methodist Church is a spiritual community, which takes seriously its responsibility to provide a safe and nurturing environment for children, youth, and vulnerable adults who participate in our ministries. All employees and volunteers who are in leadership roles in these ministries are living out the vows we take in baptism to nurture our children and youth in the Christian faith. Every volunteer and employee play a key role in fostering the spiritual development of individuals and families in our church community.

The following statements reflect the commitment of Royal Oak First United Methodist Church to provide a safe environment for all children, youth and vulnerable adults, who participate in church sponsored ministries.

In an effort to provide a safe community, this church requires all employees and volunteers to commit themselves to the Policy Statement for the Protection of Children, Youth, Vulnerable Adults adopted by the Church Council of this church.

Definition of Abuse: Any sexual contact or interaction in person or online (i.e. indecent exposure and liberties, communication for immoral purposes, fondling, rape, etc.) between a church volunteer/employee and children/youth/vulnerable adults is abusive. Force, threats, bribery, and misrepresenting right and wrong are some of the ways this crime is perpetrated in person or online. Even if a child/youth/vulnerable adult, out of ignorance, innocence, or fear does not resist, it is still abuse.

Definition of Children/Youth: Any individual under the age of 18 years old.

Definition of Vulnerable Adult: Any individual age 18 years or over who, because of age, developmental disability, mental illness, or physical disability, requires supervision or personal care or lacks the personal and social skills required to live independently.

INTRODUCTION

The General Conference of the United Methodist Church, in April 1996, adopted a resolution aimed at reducing the risk of 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 everyone. 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 sexual abuse and exploitation in their churches. Virtually every congregation has among its members, 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. (From The Book of Resolutions of The United Methodist Church - 1996. Copyright © 1996 by The United Methodist Publishing House. Used by permission. [pp. 384-386])

Thus, in covenant with all United Methodist congregations, we adopt this policy for the prevention of abuse in our church.

STATEMENT OF COVENANT

As a United Methodist congregation, we pledge to conduct the ministry of the gospel in ways that assure the safety and spiritual growth of all of our children, youth, and vulnerable adults, as well as all of those who work with the aforementioned.

Royal Oak First United Methodist Church is committed to providing a safe and secure environment for those participating in our ministry activities—children, youth, and vulnerable adults. We also seek to minimize any vulnerability to unwarranted accusations of improper behavior that our organization, volunteers, and employees may experience as they fulfill their ministerial duties. Our leadership team has adopted the following procedures to be used, without exception, when selecting volunteers and employees.

This policy is made up of five parts:

- I. Screening Procedures
- II. Counseling and Supervision
- III. Reporting Procedures
- IV. Responding to Allegations of Abuse
- V. Caring for Documents

I. SCREENING PROCEDURES

A. Volunteer Screening Procedures

Prior to consideration, all candidates seeking a volunteer position that involves working with children, youth, or vulnerable adults will complete and return the Ministry Worker Information & Renewal Form (See Appendix A) as well as an “Authorization and Release” form (See Appendix B) to allow for a criminal background check.

The ministry leader, or designee, will carefully review the application, ensuring that the candidate is an appropriate match for the position.

All applicants must be interviewed for suitability for the volunteer work they desire to do. The ministry leader, or designee, shall check at least two references to confirm the information that the volunteer provided on the Ministry Worker Information and Renewal Form. A criminal background check through a state law enforcement agency or other provider of such services shall be conducted.

When indicated by reference and/or background checks, volunteer candidates who pose a threat to others, or have a prior history of physical or sexual abuse directed against another person, will be removed immediately and permanently from consideration for positions anywhere within our organization.

Volunteers who work with children/youth must be at least 18 years old. They must be at least 3 years older than the age of the persons they are supervising. Persons not meeting this standard may not service as a volunteer but can be utilized as a “volunteer assistant” to another qualified volunteer.

All background checks shall be updated at least every three years.

B. Waiting Period

All volunteer candidates must be regularly involved in our organization for six months or more before they will be considered for any ministry position involving contact with children, youth, or vulnerable adults.

C. Employee Screening Procedures

1. The same procedures required for volunteers also apply to all potential employees, regardless of the ministry position for which they are being considered.

II. COUNSELING AND SUPERVISION

A. Supervision

1. At least two adults must be present at every function or program involving children, youth, or vulnerable adults. This includes each classroom, vehicle, or other enclosed area. One or more of these adults must be 21 years of age or older.
2. Two or more adults must be assigned to monitor children, youth, and vulnerable adult activities in areas outside the location of a ministry service or event that is in progress. The adults assigned must have been previously approved through the required screening process.
3. Workers should arrive at least 10 minutes (or more as required) before a scheduled activity. They must remain at their assigned post until all persons in their care have been picked up by an authorized person. No children, youth or vulnerable adults should be released to find their parents/guardian or wait unattended for transportation.

B. Supervision Away From Church Property

1. All children, youth or vulnerable adults participating in out of church or over-night outings must have written consent and a medical release form. (Medical release and consent forms may be completed for a one-year period and must be renewed annually).
2. There must be access to a phone or cell phone when groups are away from church property. Trip information including location, phone numbers, adults attending, departure and return times, shall be provided to parents/guardians before departing.
3. On child/youth outings, there will be a ratio of no less than 1:7 staff (or volunteer): youth supervision. Female staff/volunteer will supervise female youth in their sleeping quarters and male staff will supervise male youth. Married couples will not stay together but observe the female/female and male/male sleeping arrangements.

C. Counseling

1. When volunteers and employees meet with individuals for spiritual/emotional counseling, we encourage team counseling by two screened adults. If only one screened individual conducts the counseling session, it should be conducted in view of another screened worker through a window or an open door.
2. All counseling sessions should be limited to three occasions for no more than 30 minutes at a time. If more counseling is required, a professional counselor should be recommended.
3. Secure prior written permission from parents/guardians if the individual being counseled is a minor. If the person being counseled is an adult employee or volunteer, secure prior approval of the worker's supervisor.

D. Open Door Policy

1. This policy shall state that all parents of children, youth and vulnerable adults, the clergy, administrative and professional staff have the right to visit and observe the activity, classroom or church-sponsored program at any time, unannounced.

E Work Restrictions

1. For children who need bathroom assistance, at least one adult female should take females to the restroom, and one adult male should take males to the restroom. The adult should check to make sure the facility is safe and then wait outside the restroom. The presence of a second adult escort is recommended and would provide additional accountability.
2. All volunteers and employees should only assist in the restroom with a second adult and when required.
3. All volunteers and employees shall avoid physical contact unless it is required for care or safety reasons.
4. Volunteers and employees are to release children in their care only to parents, guardians, or persons specifically authorized to pick up the child.

F. Digital Personal or Emotional Communications with Children, Youth and Vulnerable Adults

1. Personal or emotional digital communication shall mean, any digital application, video conferencing, social media group messaging, texting and/or email that facilitates communication between volunteers and employees with children youth, or vulnerable adults of a personal nature. All the same rules apply to digital personal or emotional communication. There shall be no one-on-one personal or emotional digital communications unless there is an emergency or safety issue.

G. Discipline

1. Volunteers and employees are never to spank, hit, grab, shake, or otherwise physically discipline anyone. No corporal punishment. Physical restraint should only be used in a situation where it is reasonably necessary to prevent an individual from physically harming himself or another individual.
2. Disciplinary problems should be reported to the ministry activity coordinator or supervisor or to a parent or guardian.

H. Injuries or Illness

1. Persons who display any of the symptoms listed either now or in the past 24 hours will not be permitted to participate in any ministry activity: fever, vomiting, diarrhea, runny nose (with yellow or green discharge), cough (harsh or productive), unexplained rashes, open sores, weeping wounds, and communicable diseases (head lice, pin worms, pinkeye, ringworm, impetigo, Chicken Pox, COVID).
2. A volunteer or employee—one who has been previously approved through our ministry screening process—must be used to take the place of a worker who is ill.
3. Participants should be returned to their parent or guardian as soon as illness is discovered. If immediate return is not possible, then the person who is ill should be isolated in a manner that allows a volunteer or employee to monitor the participant until he/she can be returned to a parent or guardian.
4. Use universal precautions to avoid contact with blood, saliva, or other bodily fluids.
5. Ministry coordinators and supervisors who become aware of an injury to a volunteer, employee or participant will take steps to ensure that proper medical attention is given to the injured person and provide for continued monitoring of the remaining activity participants.
6. Apply first aid at the time of injury. If the injured party is a minor the individual's parents or guardians should be notified immediately.
7. Any injury that may require medical treatment beyond first aid should be given immediate attention. If the injured party is a minor the parents or guardians should be notified immediately, along with the ministry worker's coordinator, supervisor, or person in charge.
8. If a concussion is suspected following a head injury, immediately remove the injured party from the activity. The individual should not be allowed to continue to participate until they are evaluated by a healthcare professional. If the injured party is a minor, the individual's parents or guardians should be notified immediately.
9. If an injury or illness warrants emergency medical personnel should be called.

III. REPORTING PROCEDURES

A. Recordkeeping

1. All ministry functions involving children, youth, and vulnerable adults shall maintain an attendance list for every function. Record the date of the function, along with the names of all participants, volunteers and employees
2. A Notice of Injury Form shall be completed, whenever an injury occurs during a ministry function. Promptly forward the Notice of Injury report to the ministry coordinator, supervisor or person in charge. Additional copies are to be provided to the parent or guardian and the church office.
3. Parent or Guardian shall provide completed Youth/Child Ministry Participation Form annually to the church office. Church office shall retain form on file.

4. There shall be an annual contact list provided with contact information for all volunteers and employees working with children, youth and vulnerable adults and provided to all parents and guardians upon request.

B. Notice of Inflicted Injury, Abuse, or Molestation

1. Volunteers or employees who become aware of any inflicted injury, abuse, or molestation occurring within any ministry activity must immediately report the incident to the Designated Reporter and/or the Pastor in charge unless the allegation is against the Pastor in which case the policies of the Michigan Annual Conference of the United Methodist Church shall be followed (See Appendix C). The Designated Reporter shall be a church employee designated annually and the identity of this person shall be communicated annually to all volunteers and employees.
2. Volunteers or employees who become aware of any inflicted injury, abuse, or molestation occurring within any ministry activity must also immediately complete the following forms within 24 hours:
 - a. Notice of Injury (See Appendix D)
 - b. Report Form for Suspected Instances Of Sexual/Physical Abuse (See Appendix E)
3. Volunteers and employees must take all reasonable steps, where possible, to ensure that the alleged perpetrator of the abuse has no further contact with the alleged victim.
4. The Designated Reporter and/ or Pastor shall immediately contact the individual's parent or guardian to inform them that possible abuse or molestation has occurred. They will also ensure that the organization's attorney is immediately contacted to provide a written opinion as to whether the organization should report the abuse or molestation to law enforcement authorities. The written opinion should be obtained within 24 hours after the Designated Reporter and/or Pastor first becomes aware of the situation. The attorney's advice should be acted upon immediately, including reporting the incident to the authorities. The Designated Reporter and/or Pastor must promptly notify the ministry's insurance carrier upon notice of abuse or molestation as well as Michigan Annual Conference office of the United Methodist Church

C. Violation of Policy or Procedures

1. All volunteers and employees must promptly notify their ministry coordinator, supervisor or person in charge when they or others violate the procedures mandated by this policy.
2. Anyone who become aware of a violation of the procedures set by this policy are required to take all necessary steps to ensure future compliance with them. In the process of ensuring compliance with this policy, it may become necessary to remove individuals from their positions.

IV. RESPONDING TO ALLEGATIONS OF ABUSE

A. Internal Investigation

1. This ministry organization considers any allegation of abuse or molestation a serious matter. Each situation will be fully investigated, always with the assistance of legal counsel and civil authorities.
2. Employees who are the subject of an investigation will be immediately removed from their position, with pay, pending completion of the investigation. Further the employee shall be instructed to have no contact with anyone from the church pending the investigation.

3. Volunteer subjects of any investigation will be immediately removed from their positions pending completion of the investigation. Further the volunteer shall be instructed to have no contact with anyone from the church pending the investigation.
4. Legal counsel shall issue a written investigative report upon the completion of the investigation and all recommendations shall be acted upon.

B. Dealing with Law Enforcement, News Media

1. All employees and volunteers will cooperate fully with law enforcement or governmental agencies investigating allegations of injury, abuse, or molestation.
2. The Michigan Annual Conference will be the church appointed spokesperson to handle all inquiries from the news media. The Michigan Annual Conference will be the only ones to convey information concerning the situation, doing so in a prudent manner to avoid compromising an ongoing investigation and to maintain the privacy of the individuals involved.

V. CARING FOR DOCUMENTS

A. Annual Review

1. The procedures mandated by this policy will be reviewed annually with all volunteers, employees, ministry coordinators and supervisors, and the leadership of the organization.
2. All forms filled out by volunteers and employees, working for the Royal Oak First United Methodist Church, will only be reviewed by ministry leadership. All information will be treated in a confidential manner and stored in a secure location.

B. Revision of Policy and Procedures

The leadership of this ministry, with the assistance of legal counsel, will regularly review this policy at a minimum of every 3 years and the procedures established within it. If necessary, the policies and procedures will be modified in accordance with the bylaws of the organization. When changes are made, ministry leaders will communicate them to all employees and volunteers affected by the policy changes.

