

PROLOGUE:

Sexual misconduct and abuse of any nature (physical, emotional, neglect, sexual, or ritual) is incompatible with biblical teachings of hospitality, justice and healing. Thus, it is the policy of the Louisiana Annual Conference, UMC to conduct our ministry in ways that assure the safety and spiritual growth of everyone -adults, youth and children - and to expect the same of every congregation and ministry serving within our purview.

By Annual Conference action in June of 2008, every local church/charge, and every United Methodist related ministry, within the bounds of the Louisiana Annual Conference shall prepare, officially adopt and implement, a policy to reduce the risk of sexual misconduct or abuse by January 31, 2009.

It should be understood that no policy can eliminate all possibility of harm or abuse. This policy represents our best effort at protecting those who have been entrusted to our care.

Safe Sanctuaries Policy
Grace United Methodist Church
Ruston, Louisiana

Our faith teaches us that all human life is made in the image of God and is sacred. We believe God calls us to make Grace United Methodist Church a safe place, doing all we can to protect children, teens and other vulnerable persons from abuse. Thus, in covenant with one another, we adopt this policy for the prevention of abuse in our church.

Purpose

Our congregation's purpose for establishing this Safe Sanctuaries Policy and accompanying procedures is to demonstrate our commitment to the physical safety and spiritual growth of all who come under our care.

Statement of Covenant

Therefore, as a Christian community of faith and a United Methodist congregation, we will conduct the ministry of the gospel in ways that assure the safety and spiritual growth of all who come under our care. We will follow reasonable safety measures in the selection and recruitment of both staff persons and volunteers; we will implement prudent operational procedures in all programs, ministries and events; we will provide broad education regarding our policies, as well as recognizing the signs of abuse; 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 respond immediately and compassionately to any reported or suspected abuse, again following the requirements of state law and the policies of The Louisiana Conference of the United Methodist Church. The procedures for fulfilling this covenant can be found in this document called Safe Sanctuaries Policy of Grace United Methodist Church.

Conclusion

In all of our ministries, this congregation is committed to demonstrating the love of Jesus Christ so that every child of God 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).

I. Personnel

All persons who volunteer to work with children/teens through the ministries/activities of Grace United Methodist Church shall fall into one of the following categories. All paid staff persons shall be at the Level 1 Category.

A. Level 1 personnel – Level 1 personnel at Grace United Methodist Church include but are not limited to all persons who are paid staff. Persons at this level are required to:

1. Attend, at least annually, risk reduction policy training
2. Undergo a criminal background and reference check. If a volunteer, must have been actively involved in the congregation or ministry for a minimum of six months or if this is not possible, a reference from a local congregation must be secured or a criminal background check will also be performed.
3. Access to information obtained from a background check shall be limited to those directly involved in the decision making or supervisory process, and is confidential.
4. Clergy commissioned or ordained at or after Annual Conference 2007 and Local Pastors (and Certified Lay Ministers) in their first appointment (assignment) have undergone a background screening process sufficient for the purposes of this manual. All other clergy should be subject to background rechecks. Minimally, clergy should be rechecked at appointment changes by the Conference Board of Ordained Ministry or this congregation. Time frames for rechecks on other staff are dependent on the ministry setting. Upon credible evidence of suspicious at-risk activity, a criminal background recheck may be performed.

B. Level 2 personnel – Every volunteer who regularly supervises, or works around, children or youth at Grace United Methodist Church must be at least at level 2. This includes but is not limited to: Sunday School & VBS teachers/personnel, youth ministry volunteers, and children's church leaders. Persons at this level are required to:

1. Attend, at least annually, risk reduction policy training
2. Undergo a non-criminal background check
3. Be an active participant in the life of the congregation or ministry for at least six months prior to volunteering. If this is not possible, a reference from a local congregation must be secured or a criminal background check will also be performed.
4. Complete a "Volunteer Application" form

The information included and verified on a volunteer application will minimally be:

- a. identification of work area/service to be performed;
- b. experience and skills specifically related to the position;
- c. personal references;
- d. place of (former) employment, including references,
- e. address & contact information etc.

- f. a statement of disclosure of any criminal history or accusations of sexual, physical or emotional abuse, misconduct or harassment.
- g. A statement agreeing to inform ministry of any arrest for any crime or any allegation of sexual misconduct or abuse of any nature that occurs after the completion of the above referenced statement.
- h. a statement of consent to verify all information or obtain a criminal background check.

Non-Criminal Background Checks also include:

- 1. a personal interview with the applicant/volunteer
- 2. a signed copy of the ministry's risk reduction policy
- 3. Verifying the following may also be beneficial:
 - a. employment history for the past five (5) years; (look for gaps)
 - b. volunteer work for the past five (5) years;
 - c. church membership;
 - d. former addresses for the past 10 years;

C. Level 3 personnel – are volunteers that are used only in emergency or occasional situations. Level 3 personnel must be known to, and recommended by, a level 1 or 2 person. When time permits Level 3 personnel shall be made aware of the risk reduction policy; agree in writing to abide by the policy and to “work” only when level 1 or 2 personnel are present and supervising

II. Supervision

All ministries/activities sponsored by Grace United Methodist Church shall provide for adequate responsible adult supervision of teens and children.

- A. The term adequate responsible adult supervision is subject to a variety of legal definitions. For the purpose of this document an adult must be at least 18 years of age who is not enrolled in high school, keeping in mind that some circumstances may be subject to a different definition.
- B. All classes, studies, workshops, fellowship/recreation opportunities, one on one counseling sessions, private meetings, mentoring, etc. with youth or children shall be conducted in a public space or in a space reasonably observable by others.
 - 1. A minimum of two unrelated adults should be present as long as a child or teen is in a church facility or on a church sponsored activity. The second adult need not be present in every room at all times, but is available to roam and observe activities in the rooms.
 - 2. The presence of both male and female adult leadership (unrelated) for coed overnight activities is required.

- a. For non-overnight, coed gatherings, having both male and female adults present is recommended.

C. Transportation guidelines.

1. Medical information/release forms & permission slips are required for any activity where children and youth are away from Grace United Methodist Church's main facilities. These annual medical information/release forms & Permission slips may also include physical activities but not limited to basketball, volleyball, human foosball, Frisbee golf, baseball, and softball while on campus or local environs. Due to the nature and location of events, additional specific permission slips may be required. An example of this would be paintball.

2. Transportation Committee policy shall be followed to transport children & youth while on a Grace United Methodist Church sponsored activity.

3. Every child/teen being transported on a Grace United Methodist Church sponsored activity must be securely fastened in a seatbelt when present, whether a church or personal vehicle is being used. At no time shall the number of passengers exceed the number of useable seatbelts except school buses.

4. Safe driving is expected. Including:

- a. Obeying traffic laws.
- b. No horseplay in vehicles
- c. A mechanically sound and inspected vehicle.

5. Though it is recommended that two adults be present to transport youth or children in a vehicle, it is permissible for one adult to transport them. These accommodations make this practice acceptable:

- a. the presence of more than two youth or children in the vehicle and/or
- b. the vehicle is traveling via caravan and/or
- c. having a 3rd party observe and document accurate departure and arrival times.

- d. In addition, one child may be transported with the permission of a parent. The transporting adult must have a third party document departure and arrival times.

- e. Parents are encouraged to make random cell phone calls while children are being transported by one adult.

- f. Nothing in this policy shall be construed to prohibit a husband and wife from transporting children or youth without another adult. Couples shall follow the above policy regarding an individual adult driver.

6. It is recommended that all drivers of vehicles for church or other sponsored events shall be at least twenty-one years of age.

D. An approved check in/check-out procedure for all kindergarten aged children and younger is required. These procedures should insure that a child is released only to the child's custodial parent or the custodial parent's designee.

E. Children/Youth Ministries will educate parents on child safety issues, which may include the following:

- 800 churches grace*
22 women
1. Sharing the ministry's risk reduction policies
 2. Discussing when and where children may be unattended (for example: at what age and in which hallways, are they allowed to make their own way to a classroom, activity area etc.)
 3. Educating parents on recognizing, reporting and preventing child abuse.

F. A ratio of no less than of 1 adult to every 10 children/youth will be maintained at all Grace United Methodist Church activities involving children or teens. However, the 2 unrelated adult rule applies, even when less than 10 children/youth are present.

1. Though the above ratio is adequate in most cases, ratios are also age driven.
 - a. 1/3 for infants and toddlers
 - b. 1/8 for children through the age of 12 or 13.
2. The physical structure of the facilities (whether it lends itself to roaming adults etc) and disabilities should also be taken into consideration
3. Events or situations which exceed ratio recommendations do not in and of themselves constitute a violation of this policy.
 - a. Events such as 5th quarter may be adequately staffed with a ratio greater than 1/10. During planning, adequate supervision should be one of the factors considered. If an event is planned in which the planners are sure the ratio will exceed 1/10, the pastor or the trustee chair or the board chair will be notified.
 - b. If during an event the ratio rises above 1/10 due to the absence of staff or volunteers or the abundance of children/youth, those in charge should evaluate the situation and take reasonable steps to protect the children/youth. The pastor or the trustee chair or the board chair will be notified of this situation as soon as possible.

G. In the context of this policy, parents are responsible for their children and youth while they are attending morning worship. This policy provides the following limited coverage for children and/or youth who leave the morning worship service and who are not a part of a group activity:

01. When a child/children/youth leaves the sanctuary, two ushers will leave with them. One will remain with the child/children/youth and the other will remain in visual contact with the other usher. The usher should ascertain the reason for leaving the sanctuary. Most of the time this will be a bathroom trip. The usher(s) who accompanies the child will wait outside the bathroom. Should the child or youth be going down the hall toward the fellowship hall, one usher will remain with the child/children/youth and the ushers will remain in visual contact with each other. Trips other than to the bathroom, joining the children's church group, or a brief trip, such as to retrieve an item from a classroom, are not allowed. Children/youth wanting to do any other activity must be accompanied by at least one of their parents.

15th offering
13-15-16-17-18-19-20-21-22
15th X6-45-min
8th or 22nd
April 19
Sally

2. If a session of children's church is not covered by at least two adults, then an usher will make at least one unannounced visit to children's church during the service. Children's church leaders will notify the ushers of this need before they leave the sanctuary area. The usher will record the time of the visit and his/her name.
3. Children/youth exiting attending worship who exit the door near the chancel area are entering an unmonitored area. Parents are responsible for their children at such times.

H. It is the policy of Grace United Methodist Church that church staff members and/or trained volunteer observers will make unannounced visits to classes, nurseries, events and gatherings held both on and off campus, for the purpose of monitoring compliance with our policies. The church secretary or designee will keep a record of such visits.

I. In addition to the above guidelines, we require at least a five-year age difference between the primary on-site supervisor and the age of those being supervised at any activity involving children or teens. The five-year difference in ages shall apply between the on-site adult in charge and the age of the oldest person supervised.

1. Persons being closer in age to those supervised may be acceptable in assisting the primary on-site supervisor(s). The ratio of those "closer in age than 5 years" to those "meeting the 5 year rule" shall never exceed 3 to 1. Those not meeting the 5 year rule must still comply with all other level 1 or 2 requirements. Volunteers supervising students are not allowed to have romantic relationships with anyone to whom they are ministering. During Vacation Bible School youth helpers may be under the general supervision of adult supervisors.

III. Ministries involving adults

We are concerned about the adults involved in our ministries, congregations and care. Paid staff, clergy and lay, full and part time, should take precautions to ensure that they do not create situations which place themselves or constituents at risk.

- A. Sexual abuse within the ministerial relationship occurs when a person within a ministerial role of leadership engages in sexual contact or sexualized behavior with a congregant, employee, student, staff member, co-worker or volunteer. 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 and gender harassment must be understood as an exploitation of a power relationship rather than as an exclusively sexual or gender issue. Such exploitation/abuse is strictly prohibited
- B. One on one meetings between adults on behalf of the church/ministry are to be held in a public place where there are others present and observing. When confidentiality is required, use creativity in maintaining observability.

C. Hostile environment

1. Unlawful harassment is a form of discrimination that violates Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and other federal authority.
2. Unwelcome verbal or physical conduct based on race, color, religion, sex (whether or not of a sexual nature and including same-gender harassment and gender identity harassment), national origin, age (40 and over), disability (mental or physical), sexual orientation, or retaliation (sometimes collectively referred to as "legally protected characteristics") constitutes harassment when:
 - a. The conduct is sufficiently severe or pervasive to create a hostile work environment; or
 - b. A supervisor's harassing conduct results in a tangible change in an employee's employment status or benefits (for example, demotion, termination, failure to promote, etc.).
3. Hostile work environment harassment occurs when unwelcome comments or conduct based on sex, race or other legally protected characteristics unreasonably interferes with an employee's work performance or creates an intimidating, hostile or offensive work environment. Anyone in the workplace might commit this type of harassment – a management official, co-worker, or non-employee, such as a contractor, vendor or guest. The victim can be anyone affected by the conduct, not just the individual at whom the offensive conduct is directed.
4. Examples of actions that may create a sexually hostile environment include:
 - a. Leering, i.e., staring in a sexually suggestive manner
 - b. Making offensive remarks about looks, clothing, body parts
 - c. Touching in a way that may make an employee feel uncomfortable, such as patting, pinching or intentional brushing against another's body
 - d. Telling sexual or lewd jokes, hanging sexual posters, making sexual gestures, etc.
 - e. Sending, forwarding or soliciting sexually suggestive letters, notes, emails, or images
5. Other actions which may result in hostile environment harassment, but are non-sexual in nature, include:
 - a. Use of racially derogatory words, phrases, epithets
 - b. Demonstrations of a racial or ethnic nature such as a use of gestures, pictures or drawings which would offend a particular racial or ethnic group
 - c. Comments about an individual's skin color or other racial/ethnic characteristics
 - d. Making disparaging remarks about an individual's gender that are not sexual in nature
 - e. Expressing negative stereotypes regarding an employee's birthplace or ancestry
 - f. Negative comments regarding an employee's age when referring to employees 40 and over
 - g. Derogatory or intimidating references to an employee's mental or physical impairment

6. A hostile workplace environment does not include simple teasing, offhand comments, or isolated incidents that are not extremely serious. Rather, the conduct must be so objectively offensive as to alter the conditions of the individual's employment. The conditions of employment are altered only if the harassment culminates in a tangible employment action or is sufficiently severe or pervasive to create a hostile work environment.
- D. A Statement defining and prohibiting Sexual/Gender Harassment.
1. 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:
 - a. the creation of a hostile or abusive working environment resulting from discrimination on the basis of gender (Book of Discipline, par. 1611).
 - b. intimidating or coercive behavior that threatens or results in a tangible employment action.
 2. Gender harassment is behavior that is harassing in nature against a woman because she is a woman or against a man because he is a man.
- E. Harassment of any nature will not be tolerated. Though the language above intimates a working relationship, the prohibitions also apply to any group or gathering held under the purview of a congregation or ministry.

IV. Miscellaneous Provisions

- A. Reporting abuse is required.
1. Any suspicious or observed sexual misconduct or other abuse or violation of these policies should be reported immediately to OCS and to either the pastor, PPR Chair, or Chair of the Board of Trustees who shall report said misconduct to law enforcement agencies. (See appendix for a copy of the Louisiana Annual Conference's policy for reporting.)
 2. If an individual is a mandated reporter by the Louisiana Children's Code, such person should take whatever steps are necessary to fulfill this personal requirement.
- B. Any non-church related entity regularly utilizing any facilities controlled by a ministry covered under these policies shall abide by the risk reduction policies of both entities. Boy Scouts and Weight Watchers must give evidence of their compliance and policies annually.
- C. Should Grace UMC choose to operate a childcare facility that comes within the purview of the State, nothing in this policy is meant to conflict with any requirements imposed by the State.
- D. The board of trustees shall provide periodic review (at least every 3 years) of insurance coverage to ensure proper coverage for:
1. Misconduct
 2. Accidents & Injuries
 3. Liability

4. Offsite activities and transportation