

The Safe Sanctuary Policy of Chapelwood United Methodist Church

Approved November 30, 2005 by Trustees

Table of Contents

Introduction	Page 1
Safe Sanctuary Policy	Pages 2-7
Attachment 1: Volunteer Application	Pages 8-10

Dear Volunteer:

Thank you for making the commitment to be a part of Chapelwood's strong volunteer team. Our ministries could not function without the efforts of each one of you. Whether you are a Sunday School teacher, SWAP volunteer, work with older adults, or a youth leader, we are very grateful to you for answering God's call to serve. We trust that you will be deeply blessed as you work with the youth, children, and fragile adults of our church and Spring Branch community.

There have been churches accused of mistreating children and youth. Chapelwood wants to do everything possible to protect the people served by our ministry. The Texas Annual Conference of the United Methodist Church adopted a Safe Sanctuary policy, and asked its member churches likewise to adopt a policy. Attached you will find a copy of the Chapelwood Safe Sanctuary Policy that was unanimously approved by the Trustees at their November 30, 2005 meeting and a volunteer application. This policy is effective January 1, 2006.

The purpose of this policy is to protect children and youth to the best of our ability against willful harm. We, the church, have a tremendous responsibility to do whatever we can to provide a "safe sanctuary" for these groups. To that end, the policy requires that each volunteer (without exception) at Chapelwood that has contact with youth and children fill out the attached application so that Chapelwood can complete a background check. What will show up on this background check are misdemeanors and felonies. This may appear to be somewhat intrusive; however, in these times with the responsibility that we as a church are taking on, this is absolutely necessary. The policy also serves as a protection to our volunteers, as it outlines safety standards and includes the two-adult rule for all activities.

Please take a few moments to read the policy, complete the application and return it in the enclosed postage paid envelope. All information will be kept confidential. If you have any questions or concerns, please contact Bob Lindsey at (713) 354-4495.

Thanks again for your dedication to youth and children both at Chapelwood and the Spring Branch community.

The Safe Sanctuary Policy of Chapelwood United Methodist Church

Approved November 30, 2005 by Trustees

Chapelwood United Methodist Church is committed to providing protective care of all children, youth, vulnerable adults and volunteers who participate in church sponsored activities. The purpose of this Safe Sanctuary Policy is to address the safety of our children, youth and adults at all Chapelwood events by preventing opportunities for the occurrence and/or the appearance of abuse of children and youth and by protecting workers from false accusations or suspicions.

This policy applies to all persons including all paid and unpaid leaders, whether lay or clergy who have any direct or indirect contact with children and youth who participate in any activities or events sponsored by Chapelwood United Methodist Church.

A. Definitions of Terms Used in this Document

- Verbal Abuse:** Any verbal act that humiliates, degrades or threatens any child, youth or vulnerable adult.
- Physical Abuse:** Any act of omission or an act that endangers a person's physical or mental health. In the case of child or youth physical abuse, this definition includes any intentional physical injury caused by the individual's caretaker. Physical abuse may result from punishment that is overly punitive or inappropriate to the individual's age or condition. In addition, physical abuse may result from purposeful acts that pose serious danger to physical health of a child or youth.
- Sexual Abuse:** Sexual abuse of minors includes touching them in inappropriate ways such as fondling, inappropriate touching of the minor's body, and inappropriate kissing. Non-touch abuse includes making remarks of a sexual nature, showing the child explicit pornographic materials, or making the minor watch others engaged in sexual activity.
- Child or Youth Sexual Abuse:** Child or youth sexual abuse is the sexual exploitation or use of same for satisfaction of sexual drives. This includes, but is not limited to: 1) incest, 2) rape, 3) prostitution, 4) romantic involvement with any participant, 5) any sexual intercourse, or sexual conduct with, or fondling of an individual enrolled as a child or youth in Chapelwood sponsored activities, 6) sexualized behavior that communicates sexual interest and/or content. Examples are not limited to: displaying sexually suggestive visual materials, making sexual comments or innuendo about one's own or another person's body, touching another person's body, hair or clothing, touching or rubbing oneself in the presence of another person, kissing, and sexual intercourse.
- Childcare Provider:** A Childcare Provider is someone that is eighteen (18) years of age or older with a high school diploma or equivalent.
- Assistant Leader:** An Assistant Leader is someone 18-20 years of age with a high school diploma or equivalent, who is supervised by a leader.
- Leader:** A Leader is someone who is twenty-one (21) years of age or older.

Youth Volunteer: Someone under the age of 18 who assists with a church activity such as Vacation Bible School or Sunday morning nursery. Youth Volunteers are supervised by one or more adults in all situations.

Paid Youth Worker; Someone under the age of 18 who is paid to assist with a church activity such as Vacation Bible School or Sunday morning nursery. Youth workers are supervised by one or more adults in all situations.

B. Policy

It is the official policy of Chapelwood United Method Church that the church grounds and all church sponsored events and activities are a safe haven for all those participating. Chapelwood will provide a safe sanctuary by carefully screening and training all volunteers and employees, strictly enforcing guidelines for supervision of all Chapelwood events, and responding to all instances or possible instances of violation the safe sanctuary policy.

B.1 Personnel Screening

Personnel screening requires a careful gathering and review of information in search of those who can provide safe and caring supervision in a safe environment. Prior to employment or acceptance as a leader, assistant leader or childcare provider (paid or unpaid), the event leader in charge of an event or program shall direct each prospective applicant to complete the application and consent forms included in **Attachment 1** to this policy.

A criminal records check will be performed on each leader, assistant leader or childcare provider through appropriate law enforcement and information agencies. By signing the form, the applicant gives permission to the event leader, local congregation and/or Conference Safe Sanctuary Certification Authority to contact references and perform the necessary investigation to complete the review of the application.

Personnel screening will be done through Chapelwood's Administrative Offices, The United Methodist Church's District office, or the Methodist Conference Safe Sanctuary Certification Authority. All screening shall be done in accordance with guidelines to be established by the Conference Safe Sanctuary Certification Authority. If the applicant (paid or unpaid) is found to have been involved in any activity in which the applicant abused or exploited children or youth, the applicant will not be approved. Any conviction of a crime against children or youth shall disqualify any applicant.

The Methodist Safe Sanctuary Certification Authority shall receive the completed Application and reports from Chapelwood. If any of the reports raise questions about fitness of the applicant, the Conference Safe Sanctuary Certification Authority will disapprove the application and notify the event leader and Chapelwood.

B.1.1 Qualifying a Volunteer

The following are the conditions for qualifying a volunteer for activities involving youth or children and guidelines for leading these activities:

The applicant should be a member of Chapelwood UMC for three or more months prior to beginning of volunteer service. (Exceptions will be allowed for spouses of staff members, for persons who are active, regularly attending non-members who were not active in a prior church). **Exceptions will be allowed only if** applicant provides a letter from pastor and/or relevant staff person at prior location or if written recommendations are received from three current Chapelwood members who have been members for at least six months. It is the intent of Chapelwood to allow parents to volunteer in their children's area of participation; but, it is most important to maintain the safe environment for all activities.

Exceptions will be allowed for Chapelwood Students with Reading Buddies, Amazing Potential Volunteers (SWAP), Vacation Bible School leaders, sports programs coaches and day school volunteers with three references confirmed by a member of the Chapelwood staff.

The applicant must have completed all forms, statements, and applications provided by Chapelwood UMC.

- The applicant must have submitted to a criminal background check.
- The applicant must have completed the educational training program on the Safe Sanctuary Policy provided by Chapelwood UMC.
- Adults who have been convicted of a crime involving either sexual or physical abuse should not volunteer and will not be permitted to serve in any church-sponsored activity or program for children, youth or vulnerable adults.
- Adult survivors of childhood sexual or physical abuse need the love and acceptance of this church family. Individuals who have such a history are encouraged to discuss their desire to work with children, youth or vulnerable adults with one of the pastoral staff prior to engaging in any volunteer service.
- Adult and youth volunteers are required to attend initial and continual training and educational events provided by Chapelwood UMC to keep volunteers informed of church policies and state laws regarding child abuse. The Texas Conference of the United Methodist Church has developed training and orientating procedures for all persons in leadership who work with children and youth. No person shall have any direct or indirect contact with children or youth until they have completed this training or a Chapelwood approved equivalent.
- Adult and youth volunteers must be willing to immediately report to the Chapelwood Business Administrator and appropriate state agencies any behaviors which seem abusive or inappropriate according to the policies and procedures of Chapelwood United Methodist Church.

B.2 Supervision

To achieve the objective of the Safe Sanctuary policy, it may be necessary to combine groups; recruit, train, and reference additional volunteers; or cancel an event. Recognizing that there is safety in numbers, children and youth will be instructed to use the “buddy system.” It is also strongly encouraged that there be present at least one leader who is trained and certified in First Aid and CPR at all Chapelwood events.

Supervision for Nursery/Childcare at Chapelwood - There shall be a minimum of two (2) childcare providers per room. Whenever possible, Texas State Childcare Minimum Standards shall be followed; particularly in relation to the number of childcare providers to child ratio.

In accordance with state minimum standards, primary workers with full responsibility for children or youth must be eighteen or older. When working with youth grades 6– 12, the minimum age requirement is 21 years to serve as a Leader (as defined by our conference policy). Younger workers may be excellent helpers, but cannot be expected to have developed the maturity and judgment needed to be fully responsible in leadership.

The “Three-Years Older” Rule – There shall be at least a three-year difference between the ages of the Leader (as defined by our conference policy) and the children/youth. The three-year difference in ages shall apply between the Leader and the oldest age of the children/youth. Persons being closer in age to the

children/youth may be acceptable Assistant Leaders (as defined by our conference policy).

Clear Sight Lines- There should be unobstructed visibility to all activities where children and youth are present. Classroom doors should have windows in them or remain open. Changing a diaper and assisting a young child with the bathroom as needed should take place where the worker and the child is in sight with the child's privacy protected.

Any one-to-one mentoring or consulting shall be conducted in sight of another leader. Understanding that there is safety in numbers, one leader can be in contact with multiple youth (6th -12th grade) when they are in sight of the other leaders.

Chapelwood Events - Supervision of children and youth at Chapelwood events shall observe the "2 Leader Rule" (2 leaders per classroom, 2 leaders within line of sight when outdoors.) An exception to the "2 Leader Rule" is acceptable with the approval of the event leader. The exception will be made on a case-by-case basis. A safe and secure environment is best achieved by using two or more adults when supervising any child or groups of children/youth. Chapelwood will use the "two adult" rule in classroom settings. The "two adult" rule will be a core value for all settings for children, youth and vulnerable adults, but we recognize that there will be instances, activities, events and circumstances which will preclude us from always having a minimum of two adults. When possible, parents will be notified of this in advance. Volunteers and staff will document instances where two or more adults are not present in programs involving children, youth or vulnerable adults.

Overnight Accommodations - Events that require overnight accommodations require at least (2) leaders.

When staying in a hotel, leaders shall sleep in separate rooms from children/youth; or if necessary for children/youth to share a room with a leader, leaders shall sleep in separate beds from children/youth so long as any one leader shall not be alone with any one child/youth.

Recognizing accommodations may be restrictive in some situations; one leader is adequate, so long as any one leader shall **NOT** be alone with any one-child/youth.

Outside Groups- All outside organizations, groups, or individuals who use any of the facilities of Chapelwood shall sign a statement that they are in compliance with this policy or have an equivalent policy in force.

B.3 Response to Incidents of Abuse

The activity leader or staff member will take all suspected abuse, allegations or reports of abuse seriously and will not prejudge the situation. The leader shall follow these steps for each instance of suspected or reported abuse.

B.3.1 Dealing With the Victim

First Assess the needs for emergency care for the victim, and immediately notify the parents and/or other legally responsible adult. The care and safety of victim is the first priority.

As needed, provide emergency healthcare, including:

1. First Aid
2. Emergency services
3. Hospital emergency room

When deemed appropriate, arrange for crisis counseling and/or long-range counseling.

Second Secure and maintain the integrity of the area and protect all evidence for the professional

investigation.

- Third** Offer and provide pastoral resources as needed. Show care and support to prevent further hurt.
- Fourth** Notify legal authorities as required. Report the incident to Children's Protective Services and fully cooperate with the civil authorities under the guidance of church attorney.
- Fifth** Inform the Senior Pastor or designated representative of all details of the incident. The Senior Pastor or designated representative will release any information that is to be disseminated to the media.
- Sixth** Immediately contact the church's insurance carrier, the Chapelwood Board of Trustees chairperson, any other appropriate church body, and church legal counsel. The Church staff will be informed of incident on a "need to know" basis (to ensure privacy of the victim and/or accused) and their support enlisted as needed.
- Seventh** Document all your efforts at handling the incident, but do not attempt an in-depth investigation. This should be left to professionals who are familiar with this type of case. This is to protect the rights of the victim and the accused.

Files with all documented actions, interview notes, recorded conversations, etc. will be retained in a locked and secure area to insure privacy and confidentiality.

B.3.2 Dealing with the Accused

First secure the safety of the child, youth or vulnerable adult member is secured.

Remove the accused from any further contact with children, youth, vulnerable adults and staff. Treat the accused with dignity and support.

Offer to provide pastoral care to family of accused, as appropriate. Refer the accused to clergy outside of Chapelwood if deemed more desirable or if it is requested by the accuser's family.

B.4 Reporting Incidents

When a leader of a Chapelwood program, event or activity suspects that abuse or any suspected violation of the Texas Penal Code is taking or has taken place, he or she shall call 911 when needed and report the abuse to the appropriate local law enforcement agency and/or the Department of Protective and Regulatory Services (800-252-5400). The leader shall contact the administrator or event leader immediately, and cooperate fully with the investigation conducted by law enforcement officials or child protective services.

The leader will address any needs the child or youth may have, medical or otherwise and report the incident to the parent(s) and/or legal guardians(s).

The person suspected of abuse (respondent) shall, for the safety and well being of the children or youth, be removed with dignity from further contact with the children and youth until an appropriate investigation has taken place. The matter shall remain confidential. If the event leader is the respondent, then the report should be made to that person's Conference supervisor.

Following the report of an incident, the event leader, or supervisor in charge shall document the report, and then speak with the alleged victim, being careful to use open-ended questions.

All such conversations shall be documented. Careful and confidential documentation is essential. The documentation should include the following:

1. The name of the leader observing or receiving the disclosure of abuse, including the date, time and place and any action taken by this person.
2. The alleged victim's name, age, and date of birth.
3. Any statement made by the alleged victim.
4. Name of the respondent, the date, time and place of any conversation or any statement made by the respondent.
5. Any action taken, i.e. suspension of the respondent.
6. Date and time of call to the appropriate agency, name of worker spoken to, content of that conversation and case number assigned.
7. Date and time of call to law enforcement agency, name of officer spoken to and content of that conversation.
8. Date and time of any other contacts made regarding this incident.