

## SANDPOINT COMMUNITY UNITED METHODIST CHURCH SAFE SANCTUARY POLICY

All persons, having been created by God and invited by the Holy Spirit into a covenant relationship of love through Jesus Christ, are of inestimable worth regardless of age, sex, ethnic origin, race, cognitive capacity or psycho-social maturity.

However, any person may become the object of physical, emotional, or sexual abuse. Persons in subordinate power positions are especially vulnerable - not only children and youth but also adults, such as the developmentally or physically disabled and those experiencing grief due to recent loss. Such abuse is incompatible with God's covenant of love with us and our covenant of love with each other.

We acknowledge that no set of procedures and policies can guarantee that abuse will be prevented. Sandpoint Community United Methodist Church (hereafter SCUMC) will minister to those who have experienced abuse or who are accused of abuse. We also recognize that policies must balance the goal of prevention with the goal of ministry to persons in a covenant of love.

Affirming each person's inherent worth and vulnerability, SCUMC adopt the following policies intended to prevent abuse at any program or event of our church and to respond redemptively to signs of abuse occurring beyond church activities:

- a. Provide orientation and training for all persons working with children, youth and vulnerable adults regarding prevention, recognition, and reporting of abuse, whether that abuse is observed by a leader or disclosed by a participant.
- b. Screen paid staff and volunteer leaders for all church programs involving children and youth and vulnerable adults.
- c. Establish and implement guidelines regarding the number of leaders present for programs involving children, youth, and vulnerable adults.
- d. Adopt specific procedures and guidelines upon recommendation by the Pastor, the Director of Youth and Children's Ministry, and a representative of the initial Abuse Policy Task Force and approval of the Church Council. Such procedures and guidelines will be reviewed periodically.

Scope:

These guidelines and provisions will apply to all paid and unpaid staff who have any direct or indirect contact with youth/children/vulnerable adults regardless of medium whether online, in person, or in social media etc.

## **1. Risk Management**

### General Safety Requirements

First Aid & Health:

There shall be a first aid kit accompanying a qualified adult at all events.

Guardians shall be given advance notice and full information regarding church events and meetings to which their children are invited and will include:

- Medical permission forms which shall accompany the adult coordinator of the event.

All water sports require the presence of a lifeguard.

Events shall be designed in such a way that participants consistently remain in groups of three or more.

Immediate Reporting of Incidents Involving Physical Accidents:

- Witnesses to the accident shall share this information with the event coordinator and first aid staff.
- The first aid staff and/or event coordinator is responsible for:
  - Carefully documenting the incident using the Accident Report Form
  - Notifying guardians of those involved if needed.
  - Forwarding the Report Form to the Pastor.

### Driving Regulations

Drivers during an event or on event business shall:

- Be 18 or older and if there are passengers involved shall be at least 25.
- Possess a valid driver's license and appropriate insurance.
- Drive a legally licensed and insured vehicle.

If an adult other than a guardian provides rides to or from a church event or meeting of youth/children, the guardian must have signed the transportation waiver.

Youth are discouraged from driving themselves to church events. If a youth needs to drive to a church event there shall be no "in and out" privileges for that youth.

## Overnight Events

Boys and girls may not sleep in the same room unless there is no other option. If individuals are in the same room, they must be a minimum of three feet apart.

There shall be at least one adult of the same gender in the sleeping quarters, two adults of each gender if less than three youth/children/vulnerable adults are present.

At overnight events, a minimum of eight consecutive hours of sleep shall be scheduled per night. These hours being with lights out and quiet time and end at least one half hour prior to breakfast.

## Safety Advocates

Every church event shall be staffed with a Safety Advocate (the coordinator of the event can serve as the Safety Advocate). The Safety Advocate is responsible for promoting and maintaining church event policies/guidelines.

This Safety Advocate is responsible for communicating and maintaining church guidelines relating to abuse at every church event involving youth/children/vulnerable adults, informing youth/children/vulnerable adults of these church policies as necessary, serving as the resource person on these issues, and assisting the participants of the event in understanding appropriate boundaries and appropriate guidelines concerning issues of touch, etc. Youth/Children/Vulnerable Adults shall be encouraged to report to this person in cases of abuse but it shall be made clear that all staff members are capable of receiving reports of abuse.

The Safety Advocate is responsible for carefully documenting all aspects of an abuse incident on the Alleged Abuse Report Form.

If a person reports that they have been abused in another setting, the Safety Advocate shall consult with the event coordinators or other oversight staff and they shall make a determination of who should be informed; which may include the pastor, CPS, law enforcement, etc.

\*\*By law the person who received such a report from an abused individual has 1 week to report such abuse to CPS. Failure to do so is a felony offense.

## Guidelines for Screening Paid and Volunteer Staff

All staff working with youth/children/vulnerable adults shall complete an application or resume, interview, and a National Background Check. Applications and background check forms will be valid for two years. Staff shall be interviewed by the Pastor and at least one Staff Parish Relations committee member.

All volunteers with youth/children/vulnerable adults shall complete an interview with at least one of the following: The Director of Youth and Children's Ministry, a program coordinator, or a Nominations Committee member. All volunteers with youth/children/vulnerable adults shall also complete a Disclosure/Washington State Patrol Check Permission Form, which will be valid for two years.

Approval for adults to serve as paid or volunteer staff is at the sole discretion of the church staff person assigned to oversee the particular ministry in consideration. A criminal conviction for a sexual offense disqualifies an applicant from working with youth/children/vulnerable adults. Other automatic disqualifies usually are convictions for incest, rape, assaults involving minors, murder, kidnapping, child pornography, domestic violence to the other guardian and physical abuse.

### Orientation and Training

SCUMC believes preventive education is a primary component of the Policy for Screening Paid Staff or Volunteers and Reporting Alleged Abuse.

Orientation and training shall be provided for all adults working with children, youth, and vulnerable adults on prevention, recognition, and reporting of alleged abuse. This training will be ongoing and will be offered at least annually. SCUMC periodically will offer this consciousness training and education to the congregation.

A task force composed of a representative from Nominations and Personnel, Staff Parish Relations Committee, the Pastor, and Director of Youth and Children's Ministry will establish the training schedule and secure the trainer(s).

## **2. Code of Behavior**

### Rules of general supervision for adults working with youth/children/vulnerable adults

Adults engaged in Church events or activities with youth/children/vulnerable adults present should never engage in sexually suggestive behavior or inappropriate touching.

Any sexual or sexually suggestive or aggressive behavior by and adult toward any fellow worker or event participant at a church event where an imbalance of power exists between the acting adult and the other person constituted an abuse of power. Consent is not a defense to an abuse of power.

Sexual harassment is any unwanted sexual advance, physical or verbal demand, or sexually suggestive behavior which is perceived as demeaning, intimidating or coercive. Prohibited behavior includes unsolicited and unwelcome contact that as sexual or coercive overtones including any written, verbal, physical, or visual contact.

The following guidelines for touching are to be carefully followed by anyone working with youth/children/vulnerable adults:

- Touching should always be initiated by the youth/child. The adult should respond to the child's need for comfort and encouragement and not base touching on their own emotional needs. Appropriate touching by an adult is limited to holding hands as part of a group activity; touching only the head or shoulders, and/or a hug of the shoulders.
- Touching between an adult and a youth/child shall only occur in the presence of other adults.
- A youth/child's preference not to be touched should be respected by adults and others. This includes youth to youth and child to child.

Anytime an adult thinks that their own or another adult's behavior towards a youth/child, either touching or verbal, may have been perceived as inappropriate, that adult shall report the behavior to their Safety Advocate.

All adults shall avoid being alone, one-on-one, with youth/children/vulnerable adults. Whenever possible, interaction with youth/children/vulnerable adults shall be conducted within the sight/supervision of at least one other adult. In cases where it is impossible to directly avoid one-on-one interactions, the following guidelines shall be observed:

- If an adult or leader is alone with youth/children/vulnerable adults, two or more youth/children/vulnerable adults shall be present with the adult or leader.
- If interactions are being conducted in a classroom and there is only one adult available, there shall be a roamer on premises and the classroom door shall remain open.
- When private consultation is needed between a youth/child and an adult, another adult shall be informed of the activity and of the location in which the activity is taking place. The monitoring adult shall strive to ensure that the consultation takes place in a public space within sight of others but not necessarily within hearing range.

Adults shall respect the privacy of youth/children/vulnerable adults when changing clothing or showering to the extent safety allows.

Youth/Children/Vulnerable Adults shall be supervised at all times by at least one adult who is at least four years older than the oldest youth/child who is attending the event as a participant.

When only two adults are required for supervision the second adult shall not be related to the first adult in any way.

**Ratios:** The following ratios will be in place for age-level church events.

- Younger Children (preschool & under): 1 adult to 4 children
- Children (Kindergarten - Grade 5): 1 adult to 6 children
- Jr. High (Grade 6 - Grade 8): 1 adult to 6 youth
- Sr. High (Grade 9 - Grade 12): 1 adult to 8 youth

At least 50% of adults at an event where junior high are present shall be at least 21 or older.

There will be absolutely no drinking of alcohol, use of products containing marijuana, or use of illegal drugs at or during conference events. Any drinking of alcohol, use of products containing marijuana, or use of an unprescribed controlled substance will lead to immediate suspension and removal from the event.

Possession of firearms at a church event is forbidden.

All adults working with youth/children/vulnerable adults shall abide by all laws and regulations applicable to the location of the event.

### **3. Responses to Code Infractions at an Event**

#### Responding to Behaviors that Hinder Our Mission

In addition to the behaviors that are described above, there are other behaviors that may hinder our mission. Examples of these incidents include a chaperone who continually undermines program objectives or an even planner who neglects staff training or health and safety concerns, etc. When serious concerns arise:

- The event coordinator shall encourage the person raising the concern to talk directly with the person whose behavior is considered detrimental.
- If the person raising the concern is unwilling or unable to talk directly with that person or if the initial conversation is unproductive, then the event coordinator shall meet with the two individuals to seek resolution.
- If a mutually agreed-upon resolution is not possible, then the event coordinator shall have the authority to prescribe a resolution.
- Anonymous complaints or evaluations shall be considered unverifiable, and therefore, will have no foundation for being officially addressed.
- Persons whose behavior hinders the goals of the ministry may face review of their participation in leadership for that behavior.
- If the person who is perceived to be hindering the mission is the event coordinator then the person who is raising the concern may report to the pastor, another church staff member, or to the Safety Advocate if the former are not readily available.

#### Responding to Allegations of Abuse

All reports of abuse shall be treated with utmost seriousness and confidentiality.

The highest priority shall be placed on securing the safety of the victim. In no case shall the accused be confronted until the safety of the victim is secured.

The person who received the report of abuse shall immediately share this information with the Pastor, Director of Youth and Children's Ministry, Safety Advocate, or with the event coordinator who shall then:

- Carefully document all aspects of the incident using the Alleged Abuse Report Form. (\*\*Alleged Abuse Report Forms will be available at trainings, in the church office, or from program coordinators.)
- Forward the report immediately to the Pastor.
- The person who first hears the allegation of abuse, in partnership with the Safety Advocate, is responsible for reporting to the Child Protective Services or to the appropriate law enforcement agency.
- The Safety Advocate or event coordinator will notify the guardians when and if it is clear that it is safe to do so.
- Any volunteer or hired staff person accused of abuse shall be immediately relieved of duties related to this or any church-sponsored event and shall be isolated from further contact with participants, guests and others who may be negatively impacted by the individual's presence until the review process is completed. The accused may not return to duties until the church staff has completed a review. This applies whether or not the alleged act of abuse occurred during a church-sponsored event.
- If the person accused of abuse is the Pastor, Director of Youth and Children's Ministry, Safety Advocate, or the event coordinator, the abuse should not be reported to them and instead reported to one of the other individuals designated to receive such reports.

#### Responding to Illegal Behavior

Any volunteer or hired staff person accused of felonious activity shall be immediately relieved of duties related to this or any other church-sponsored event and shall be isolated from further contact with participants, guests and others who may be negatively impacted by their presence until a review process is completed. If the felonious activity was not committed during a church-sponsored event, then the church staff person relating to the program area shall have discretion as to whether immediate or remedial action is required. the accused may not return to duties until the church staff person has completely a review.

#### **4. Annual Review**

At least annually for the three years following the adoption and enactment of this policy, the church counsel will undertake to review the implementation of this policy.