

Safe Sanctuaries

The History of Safe Sanctuaries®

In 1990, Frank O'Neal, a teacher in Tennessee, set up a fund in honor of his mother (Mattie) and his wife (Eleanor) to challenge and assist local congregations in ministering to families and children, targeted toward prevention, intervention, and elimination of child abuse. He believed that if information on abuse was made available to pastors that they would act. The first brochure listed resources that were available through The UM National Youth Ministry Organization, The General Board of Global Ministries, The General Board of Discipleship, United Methodist Communications, and The United Methodist Association of Health and Welfare Ministries. There was so much demand for the brochures that they had to put all of the secretaries on processing duties to keep up with it.

The 1996 General Conference of The United Methodist Church adopted (and subsequently readopted) a resolution aimed at reducing the risk of child sexual abuse in the church. The foundation for this is within the Social Principles on the Rights of Children (Book of Discipline, ¶162.C). There were also two related resolutions, "Putting Children and their Families First," and "Sexual Ethics within Ministerial Relationships," which is now "Sexual Misconduct Within Ministerial Relationships."

Today, each Annual Conference of The United Methodist Church has a written and accessible policy. These policies stress the importance of the Biblical mandate from Matthew 19:14, "Allow the children to come to me, don't forbid them, because the kingdom of heaven belongs to people like these children." (Common English Bible)

Safe Sanctuaries® Training

Reducing the Risk of Sexual Abuse: Safe Sanctuaries® is one of the "social structures that are consistent with the gospel" (Book of Discipline, ¶122) allowing our sanctuaries, classrooms, mission encounters, camps and retreats, and all spaces where we gather to worship and serve God to be places of trust.

Training is required for all persons having direct contact with children, youth, and vulnerable adults in all activities connected with local congregations, annual conferences, and camp settings. The minimum standard of training shall include an annual orientation that includes information about the Safe Sanctuaries Policy; training in the supervision of children, youth, and vulnerable adults; and training in the identification and reporting of abuse.

Those who wish to serve in ministries with children, youth, and vulnerable adults must be actively engaged in the life of the congregation for at least six (6) months prior to service, including worship, Sunday School, mission opportunities, and other ministries so that the people serving with children, youth, and vulnerable adults are known in the congregation. Groups of children and youth will be supervised by two non-related, noncohabitating adults, and each supervising adult will be five years older or more than the oldest child or youth in the group.

Safe Sanctuaries® training stresses the importance of face-to-face training and conversation when online training is used. The opportunity to talk through case studies or issues specific to a particular context is imperative so that each person working with the most vulnerable has an understanding of what is expected.

Not putting appropriate policies, procedures, and guidelines in place allows for the risks of abuse to increase. Congregations who develop and live into Safe Sanctuaries® find it a deterrent to predators who are looking for easy access to the vulnerable. Each congregation needs to honor children, youth, and vulnerable adults enough to protect them from bodily harm, emotional damage, and spiritual destruction.

Available Training Opportunities through Discipleship Ministries of The United Methodist Church

Basics of Safe Sanctuaries®

- Quarterly Safe Sanctuaries® Interactive Webinars
- Safe Sanctuaries® - Reducing the Risk of Abuse in the Church for Children and Youth
- Support in Developing and Updating Safe Sanctuaries® Policies and Guidelines

Clergy and Laity Resources

- Quarterly Safe Sanctuaries® Interactive Webinars
- Safe Sanctuaries® - Reducing the Risk of Abuse in the Church for Children and Youth
- Safe Sanctuaries® - Older Adults: The Church Responds to Abuse, Neglect, and Exploitation of Older Adults

Training the Trainer Resources

- Twice Yearly Safe Sanctuaries® Train-the-Trainer Interactive Webinars
- Newly Developed Training Videos (2016)

Sexual Ethics Resources

- SEX: A Christian Perspective on Our Bodies, Decisions, and Relationships for 6th, 7th, and 8th Grade Youth
- Safe Sanctuaries for Ministers Best Practices and Ethical Decisions

Quick, Downloadable Resources

- Weekday Preschool Considerations
- Traveling with Youth
- Social Media and Teachers
- Camp and Retreat Settings
- Sample Policies and Guidelines
- Supervising Children
- Educating the Congregation
- Sample Leader Guidelines
- Youth Event Guidelines
- Registered Sex Offender Considerations

Additional Resources Available

- [How to Begin Developing and Updating Safe Sanctuaries Policies and Guidelines](#)
- [Sample Documents for Developing and Updating Safe Sanctuaries Policies and Guidelines](#)
- [Training Downloads and Webinars](#)
- [Safe Sanctuaries Coordinators in Annual Conferences of The United Methodist Church](#)
- [Safe Sanctuaries Staff at Discipleship Ministries](#)

Background Screening

Anyone who has access to or works with children, youth, or vulnerable adults will have a background check prior to interaction with them. **The initial check should cover three years prior to service with subsequent background checks every two years.** Background checks include but are not limited to criminal record checks, sexual predatory list checks, social security number check, address history check, and employment history check.

There are many background check choices available. [Trak-1](#) is recommended. It will deliver Web-based solutions that promote truth, support informed decision making, protect people and instigate transformation through professional background screening. Also, congregations and camps should set up a standardized procedure for vetting the information on the Sex Offender Registry, which is publicly accessible. Consult legal counsel before proceeding as there are many employment laws that could govern these unique situations.

Source: United Methodist Insurance Website



United Methodist Insurance

Property & Casualty Coverage for Your Ministry

THE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH