

# **Bothell United Methodist Church Safe Church/Safe Sanctuary Policy**

(Updated February 2015)

## **STATEMENT OF PURPOSE**

We believe it is our duty as the Church to guard and protect the children, youth, and vulnerable adults given to our care. We want our congregation to be a place of safety, trust, and compassion- an embodiment of God's love for all. By doing all in our power to prevent abusive behavior, and by responding appropriately to abuse when it does occur, we help God create a loving and just community. We also serve as a model for ethical standards in our community.

The purposes of this policy are:

- A. To prevent physical, sexual, and emotional abuse of children (infant – 12 yrs), youth (13-17 yrs) and vulnerable adults (18 yrs and older unable to care for themselves or unable to protect themselves from harm or exploitation) within all church activities programs.
- B. To respond to abuse that comes to our attention-whether it happens within the church, or in an outside setting- in ways that protect victims, stop the abuse, and encourage healing for all involved.
- C. To create and maintain a safe environment for the children, youth and adults of our congregation.

The following methods will be used:

- 1. Safe staffing
- 2. Disclosures of Abuse
- 3. Preventative Education
- 4. Forms

## **1. SAFE STAFFING**

### **A. Minimum Age Standard for Supervision of Children and Youth**

Minimum age standards allow persons to be separated from the supervised group by enough years to have perspective and to act as credible authority figures.

Persons providing supervision for groups of children or youth must be at least four years older than the oldest members of the group. Younger assistants may serve under adult supervision only, and are not counted as adults. Our nursery is to be staffed by two attendants and one must be over 21 years old.

This provision applies to activities and classes for children and youth sponsored by the church, whether on site or elsewhere. Examples: UMYF, Church School, Youth Classes,

Vacation Bible School, Sunday and weekday nursery care, Children's Choirs, retreats and trips. Staff and elected officers supervising these programs are responsible for enforcing this standard.

## **B. Standards for Adequate Supervision**

Adequate supervision is important to insure that all are cared for, and to provide continued supervision in an emergency. On Sunday mornings, or whenever other adults are in the building, the following minimum ratios are recommended:

<u>Persons Attending</u>	<u>Adult Supervision</u>
Infants to 11 months	1 to 4
Toddlers 1 – 3 years	1 to 7
4 to 5 years	1 to 10
1 <sup>st</sup> grade – 6 <sup>th</sup> grade	1 to 15
7 <sup>th</sup> grade – 12 <sup>th</sup> grade	1 to 20

When a group is alone in the church building, or meeting elsewhere, the following ratios are required:

<u>Persons Attending</u>	<u>Adult Supervision</u>
Infants to 5 years	1 to 4
Grades 1 – 4	1 to 6
Grades 5 - 8	1 to 7
Grades 9 - 12	1 to 8

Trips away from the church and overnight events at the church require a minimum of two adults, one of each gender, to provide for emergency needs. It is recommended that two adults be present with any group of youth or children meeting at the church.

Unforeseen circumstances may require exceptions. Exceptions to these requirements require approval of one of the staff members of the church.

## **C. Nursery Identification Policy**

1. A registration form is filled out for each child, and an identification number assigned to them. This number will be theirs any time they are being cared for in the nursery (as long as they are 2 years or under).
2. Tags with the corresponding number are also assigned to the child.
3. Each time the child is brought to the nursery for care a parent records their name and tag number on the attendance sheet provided. One tag, with the child's name on it, is pinned on the child, one is pinned on any belongings brought, and the other is taken by the parent.

4. When the parent returns for the child, they give the tag to a nursery attendant at the door. The attendant will then match the tag to the child and their belongings and bring them to the parent.
5. If the parent cannot produce the identification tag, the attendant will ask to see proof of identification and will match it against the information on the registration form.
6. No child will be released from BUMC's nursery unless the identification tag has been produced or the identification of the person picking up the child matches the information on the registration card.
7. First time visitors will be asked to fill out the registration form as described above, but will be given a visitor identification number. Once the child has been in the nursery 3 times, they will receive a permanent number.

#### **D. Designated Safety Officer**

Bothell United Methodist Church will appoint a Designated Safety Officer (DSO) who will be responsible for tracking background checks on-line, reviewing the Abuse Prevention and Reporting policy with new volunteers and church staff, supervision of the policy compliance and will be a liaison to the SPR Committee, the Lay Caring Ministry, and Youth and Children's Council. The DSO will be fully trained on the BUMC Abuse Prevention and Reporting and the Pacific Northwest Conference Youth and Children Event Policy. The DSO will also be expected to attend district and conference training sessions applicable to these policies. The DSO will be a volunteer, non-staff person who is not involved with youth or children activities at Bothell United Methodist Church. The DSO will be a well-recognized "safe" person that members of the congregation can comfortably go to with concerns and reports of policy violations.

#### **E. Screening of Volunteers and Paid Staff**

In our mobile society we often have little knowledge about persons who may volunteer or apply for a paid position in the church. Since it is awkward to ask only new people for background information, the following steps apply to anyone who wishes to serve in a way that is likely to involve unsupervised access to children, youth, vulnerable adults, or developmentally disabled persons (hereafter called "unsupervised access"). Persons 16 years and older will be checked.

Participation in any of the following roles will require prior screening:

- Sunday School teachers
- VBS Leaders
- Nursery Attendants
- Agape Team
- VIM Team Leaders

- Youth Counselors (including parents asked to chaperone on a youth trip)
- Sunday School assistants
- Children and Youth Music Leaders

Disclosure forms, screening reports, and application forms are to be used at the beginning of a volunteer's or staff's service. Current volunteers and employees are not subject to this requirement except at the beginning of a teaching term or at the start of a new program.

So that the process is not repeated unnecessarily, applications, disclosure forms, and screening reports shall be kept in a secure file under control of the Senior Pastor. Program staff and others making hiring decisions may have access only to information relevant to their decisions. Individuals may have access to their own files.

#### **F. Application Form**

A person desiring to begin service in the church that is likely to involve unsupervised access shall complete either an "Application for Employment" form or an "Application for Volunteer Position" form.

#### **G. Disclosure Form**

A person desiring to begin service in the church that is likely to involve unsupervised access shall complete the "Background Check Authorization" form.

#### **H. Interview**

An interview provides opportunity to follow up on written information and to evaluate a person's appropriateness for a position. For a volunteer position involving unsupervised access, the church officer or staff responsible for the program may conduct an interview in person or by telephone. The staff member responsible for the program will have final decision regarding acceptance of volunteers. For a paid non-staff position involving unsupervised access (childcare provider), both the church officer and the church staff member responsible shall conduct the interview. For a non-pastoral staff position involving unsupervised access, a search committee is appointed by the SPRC.

#### **I. Background Checks**

Bothell United Methodist Church uses Intellicorp Background Checks for screening throughout the full United States. This information may be used only in making decisions concerning employment or volunteer positions. Background check forms shall be submitted by the Designated Safety Officer. Intellicorp charges a fee. The fee will be paid by BUMC. Background forms will be filled out every year. Generally, each will be submitted to Intellicorp every 3 years. There is a spreadsheet on the BUMC "K" drive that records dates of all background checks.

A person may begin employment or volunteer service pending receipt of the screening report but shall not have unsupervised access until the report is received. Within ten days of receiving the report, the church must inform the person that the screening has been completed, and offer to provide information. If convictions appear that were not disclosed by the applicant, a staff member must discuss them with the applicant before a decision about continued service is made. Convictions suggesting risk to those with whom he/she would work shall constitute grounds for dismissal of employee or volunteer.

## **2. DISCLOSURES OF ABUSE**

### **A. Responding to Disclosures of Abuse**

Physical, sexual or emotional abuse may come to the attention of church volunteers or staff in many ways. A teacher might see marks on a child week after week; a youth might allude to sexual abuse happening at home; an adult might reveal sexual abuse by a previous pastor; a youth might report abuse at a church retreat or camp. The responses outlined below aim first at protecting the victim and stopping the abuser's harmful behavior. Continuing pastoral care may also be needed by victims, abusers, and family members.

### **B. Receiving a Disclosure**

It is the special responsibility of church staff and volunteers to respond to disclosures of abuse with compassion. The listener should remain calm and open. Children especially need reassurance that they are believed, and that they will be helped. The listener may ask questions to elicit needed information, while avoiding leading questions. (For instance, saying, "Who did this to you? Rather than, "Did your dad do it?") Written notes should be made after the conversation. (The person first receiving the disclosure is called the "initial contact" below.)

### **C. Reporting to Civil Authorities**

It is the intention of this church that allegations of physical abuse, sexual abuse, or neglect be reported to the appropriate civil authorities. A report is best made by the initial contact, with support and consultation from a pastor or the Designated Safety Officer (see "Consultation & Reporting" below). Use the "Record Form for Suspected Abuse or Neglect"

Allegations of abuse or neglect by a family member shall be reported to Child Protective Services for professional investigation and risk assessment. Past abuse should be reported, since recurrence or abuse to other children may be averted.

Allegations of abuse by a person outside the family shall be reported to the police in the jurisdiction where it occurred. This may include helping a youth report sexual assault (i.e., date rape).

Reporting of allegations does not require, and does not constitute, a determination of guilt. Whether a crime has been committed can only be decided in the legal system, where the accused is considered innocent unless proven guilty.

#### **D. Consultation and Reporting Within the Church**

Although a report to civil authorities may be made anonymously, the pastor(s) need(s) to have knowledge of the situation within the church. Whether or not an outside report is made, the initial contact shall inform the Designated Safety Officer or an appropriate staff member of the situation as soon as possible. This person will notify the senior pastor. If the initial contact is other than the Designated Safety Officer then they shall also notify the DSO who will be prepared to offer support and receive reports. The Designated Safety Officer shall be familiar with this policy, and with the Conference “Policy and Procedures for Dealing with Clergy Sexual Misconduct.”

All persons involved in a case of alleged abuse or neglect shall maintain confidentiality, sharing information only to make appropriate reports as part of an investigation or to protect the victim from further harm.

If the alleged offender is a church volunteer or staff member, one of the pastors shall make immediate contact with the person, and remove him or her from all duties that involve contact with vulnerable people until safety is assured. A paid staff member is expected to continue work in all areas that do not involve contact with vulnerable people, and shall remain on full salary.

If the alleged offender is a pastor, the Designated Safety Officer should receive the report from the initial contact or the victim. An immediate report shall be made to the District Superintendent.

#### **E. Church Record of Suspected Abuse or Neglect**

All disclosures of abuse or neglect shall be recorded on the form “Church Record of Suspected Abuse or Neglect”. The blank forms shall be available in the church office. The form should be completed in ink, and filed with a pastor or the Designated Safety Officer, so that subsequent actions can be recorded.

The Senior Pastor shall maintain a permanent, confidential file of these record forms. The person who made the disclosure shall have access to the record of his or her case, along with the pastors and the Designated Safety Officer.

### **3. PREVENTATIVE EDUCATION**

The Church Council shall see that an annual training session is conducted for church staff and volunteers who work with children, youth, and vulnerable adults. Content shall include:

- ❖ Biblical background and Christian tradition
- ❖ Orientation to church policy (safety plan)
- ❖ Indicators of abuse and neglect
- ❖ How to listen to a disclosure
- ❖ Responsibilities of one who receives a disclosure
- ❖ Confidentiality
- ❖ Long-term effects of abuse and neglect
- ❖ Appropriate ways to discipline

The Church Council shall also make available a self-study version of the training materials for use by new volunteers between annual training sessions. This shall include the Agenda for the annual session and the complete safety Policy.

Training by one of these methods is mandatory for new and continuing staff and volunteers working with children, youth, and vulnerable adults. It shall be available to any interested person in the congregation. A list of those who have received the training shall be maintained in the church office.

The Church Council, through its work areas, shall also encourage education of the entire congregation about child abuse and other forms of sexual and physical abuse, prevention strategies, and the healing process for survivors, abusers, and their families.

### **4. FORMS**

- A. National Background Check Authorization
- B. Application for Employment
- C. Record of Suspected Abuse or Neglect
- D. Church Record of Suspected Abuse or Neglect

Note: A copy of the Safety Policy can be found:

1. BUMC computer system: “K” drive, Safe Church Policy
2. BUMC web site: [bothellumc.org](http://bothellumc.org), About Us, Safe Church/Safe Sanctuary Policy
3. Church Office: Hard copy in file drawer