

# *Orchard Ridge United Church of Christ*

## **Safe Sanctuaries Policy**

Passed by congregational vote on May 2, 2004

*Revised May 2013*

***Jesus said, "Let the little children come to me, and do not stop them; for it is to such as these that the Kingdom of Heaven belongs." (Matthew 19:14)***

At Orchard Ridge United Church of Christ, we believe that our church should be a safe sanctuary for all those who come in good faith. Most importantly, it should be a safe sanctuary for the children and youth who are entrusted to us.

The physical or sexual abuse of a child is a tragedy no matter where it occurs; it is especially so when it takes place in a house of God. Abuse in a church is the ultimate violation of a sacred trust. We also acknowledge that the abuse of children is a reality, and that no church is immune from that reality.

We want our congregation to be a haven, free of sexual misconduct or harassment. To help reach these goals, we have adopted the following policies, procedures, and educational programs to reduce the possibility of child sexual or physical abuse, or any type of sexual misconduct or harassment from occurring in our congregation. The educational aspect will make us aware of potential problems, and the implementation of prudent policies should help safeguard our children, youth, and members. While not all policies can anticipate and prevent all misfortune, they can state a purpose and provide guidance to achieve the purpose. These policies express our keen interest in protecting our children and youth, while maintaining the trusting atmosphere of our congregation for the entire congregation, adults and children alike.

We therefore enact this policy to establish and enforce rules and procedures to eliminate, as much as possible, the risk of abuse in our children and youth programs and activities.

To that end, this policy:

- Requires that classes and classrooms be configured to eliminate the possibility of children being isolated; mandates specific rules for each program and activity for children and youth, inside and outside the church building, to ensure safety;
- Provides education about child abuse for the congregation, parents, youth volunteers and staff, children, visitors and others who use the church for their activities;
- Requires that those who work with children and youth, paid staff or volunteer, be carefully selected and screened, educated about the issue of abuse and trained to recognize signs of abuse; and
- Establishes a procedure to ensure that all allegations of physical or sexual abuse against a child, by an adult or another child, be taken seriously and dealt with swiftly and

appropriately, and that victims and their families be supported and treated with respect and compassion.

**SECTION ONE: RECRUITING CONGREGATIONAL WORKERS:** Our congregation welcomes staff and volunteers who have been members or a regular attenders of our congregation for at least six months to become involved with the Educational and Youth Programs at various levels of commitment. In order to ensure that all volunteers are ready to engage with children and youth, all those who wish to apply must attend 1.) a Safe Sanctuary Workshop, usually held twice a year by The Safe Sanctuary Advocacy Team and 2.) a New Members Class, also held twice a year. *(Note: there is no obligation to become members of the church; the purpose of attending the New Member Class is for the volunteer to learn more about our church and for our church to learn more about the volunteer.)* The Associate Pastor for Children, Youth and Families shall be responsible for screening applicants for such volunteer and staff positions. There are two levels of screening: primary and secondary.

**PRIMARY SCREENING PROCEDURE:** Those workers such as teachers and youth group leaders who will have appointed and frequent contact with children and/or youth must undergo the primary screening procedure by reviewing this policy and completing the attached application form. Current congregation volunteers and staff members are requested to submit to screening procedure to signal to the entire congregation their support of the steps being taken. Furthermore, volunteers and/or paid staff or anyone with anticipated unmonitored contact with youth or children will complete Background Information Disclosure & Screening Form. The Associate Pastor for Children, Youth and Families will review the submitted form and conduct a personal interview as needed (for example, if a background check reveals something questionable, the Associate Pastor for Children, Youth and Families would interview the applicant to gain further details and insight into the applicant's background to make a more informed decision). The Associate Pastor for Children, Youth and Families will arrange for a Criminal Records Background Check, when applicable, and will check references for paid staff. Once all the information is compiled, the Associate Pastor for Children, Youth and Families in consultation with the Senior Pastor and Chair of the Youth Faith Formation Ministry will confirm the applicant's suitability to serve. Ongoing and formal training will be provided to the Associate Pastor for Children, Youth, and Families regarding screening procedures, background check procedures, and procedures for interviewing individuals to screen for possible misconduct.

**SECONDARY SCREENING PROCEDURE:** Applicants who will have limited contact with children or youth over the course of a year, such as the occasional nursery assistant, craft/play time leader, or youth group driver are asked to review this policy, its code of behavior, and return a signed acknowledgment indicating such a review to the Associate Pastor for Children, Youth and Families.

Any person known to have committed previous acts of sexual misconduct with children or youth shall be strictly prohibited from serving our children or youth. All persons will have read and agreed to abide by all Policies and Procedures herein. Signature upon the appropriate primary or secondary application denotes a willingness to remain in compliance with these or their successors.

**SECTION TWO: EDUCATION AND TRAINING:** The Associate Pastor for Children, Youth and Families, the Youth Faith Formation Ministry, and the Safe Sanctuary Advocacy Team will be responsible for the implementation of procedures designed to educate volunteers, staff and congregation members regarding these policies and procedures. As part of each new congregation employee's orientation, each employee will review these policies, procedures and code of behavior. The Associate Pastor for Children, Youth and Families will insure that the Youth Faith Formation Ministry and Safe Sanctuary Advocacy Teams define and implement procedures designed to further the intent of these policies, and educate volunteers and staff on these procedures through regular training programs. The Ministry of Resources shall design and maintain procedures related to building use which uphold the intent of this policy. Annual training programs will teach staff and volunteers how and when to report a possible sexual misconduct incident and how to discuss questionable behavior with the Associate Pastor for Children, Youth and Families.

**SECTION THREE: MAINTENANCE OF RECORDS:** Records of all actions required by this policy and any material pertinent to it, including reports, workers' surveys, and application and acknowledgment forms, shall be kept for a legally appropriate time in a secure and confidential place, the location and security measures to be determined by the Associate Pastor for Children, Youth and Families and the Safe Sanctuary Advocacy Team.

**SECTION FOUR: SAFE SANCTUARY ADVOCACY TEAM:** A Safe Sanctuary Advocacy Team shall be established for two purposes. 1. In the event that a volunteer, congregation member or staff member is uncomfortable reporting an allegation of sexual misconduct to the Senior Pastor or the Associate Pastor for Children, Youth and Families that person may take the allegation or concern to the Advocacy Team. 2. The Team will also serve to support staff members charged with carrying out education of the policy to staff, volunteers, and congregation and assist in the and enacting the Response Plan.

The Team will be composed of at least three people, including at least one female and one male, appointed by the Youth Faith Formation Ministry for indefinite terms. The Team will be a Mission Team supported by the Youth Faith Formation Ministry and the Mission Team members may serve on other Ministry and Mission Teams. Team members will be noted on documents related to this policy and changes will be announced promptly in congregation publications. All members of this team shall maintain a strict code of confidentiality.

Team members will undergo thorough screening, background checks and education on the issue of child abuse before being allowed to serve. The team will oversee the educational component of the policy. Team members will also serve as a support to the response team, which has the responsibility of receiving and acting on allegations of abuse and providing healing for victims, families and the congregation.

**SECTION FIVE: RESPONSE PLAN:**

- The safety of the child or youth will be paramount.
- Confidentiality of all involved will be respected.
- All childcare or youth workers and volunteers are mandated to report any suspected or known child abuse (whether the abuse is suspected to have occurred at church or

otherwise) immediately to proper church authorities. These authorities will be the pastoral staff, the church Moderator and the Moderator-Elect who will function as the Abuse Response Team. (If a youth worker or volunteer cannot follow the normal procedure of reporting an incident to a member of the Abuse Response Team for any reason, he or she should immediately contact the local police department. For example, if a group is on a mission trip or other out of town youth event, the local police department should be contacted.)

- If a report of abuse is made, the Senior Pastor, the Associate Pastor for Children, Youth and Families, and the Moderator will collaboratively determine if it needs to be reported to the authorities.
- If the alleged perpetrator is a member of the Response Team, the report can be made to a member of the Safe Sanctuary Advocacy Team who will inform the non-accused members of the Response Team and UCC Leaders outside the church. The first contact shall be Associate Conference Minister responsible for the Southwest Association. If this person is not available, contact the Wisconsin Conference Minister.
- When an allegation of abuse is made, the recipient of the report should write down what has been alleged using the child's/reporter's words. The reporter is to take down the information without asking investigative or leading questions to the child so as to not hurt the investigation. This report should be made available to the investigating authorities.
- The Police Department/Department of Human Services will be the investigative body and deal with the alleged perpetrator.
- The Response Team will report any allegation to the UCC Southwest Wisconsin Association minister.
- The original reporter of the abuse will receive appropriate feedback as needed.
- The Senior Pastor and the Associate Pastor for Children, Youth and Families will consult with the Leadership Team about how to proceed with any public information or communication with the congregation if deemed necessary.
- The is designated as the only spokesperson for communication with the media, if there are media requests for comment or information. During the investigative stage of any allegation, the church spokesperson should limit statements to the fact that the church takes any allegation seriously and is fully cooperating with authorities. Under no circumstances should a spokesperson discuss any aspect of a case. When an allegation is resolved, members of the pastoral staff or the Moderator should consult with the Leadership Team before issuing any statement or making any comment.
- Preliminary counsel will be provided to those involved and as appropriate, referrals for counseling will be made.
- After all the necessary investigative avenues have been followed through, the church leadership and the pastoral staff will work to facilitate a healing process and foster a safe and affirming environment for the victims of the abuse and for the entire congregation.

## **A CODE OF BEHAVIOR**

This code will be part of an initial and on-going training program.

Volunteers who have taken an active part in the life of the congregation may be invited to become involved with the Educational and Youth Programs at various levels of commitment. During this time, those planning to be directly involved in the life of the congregation shall receive training and accept the following code of behavior. New employees, having satisfied the Primary Screening Process, employed to work with children and youth, may assume his/her position immediately.

**Covenant:** Maintaining child and youth safety within our church and understanding our practices is a matter for covenant within our congregation.

**Posting:** These guidelines and policies should be clearly posted in all classrooms, in the Friendship Hall, and throughout the church.

**Adult Supervision:** No teacher, advisor, aide or anyone else working with our children or youth should place themselves in a compromising situation by being alone with a child or with children out-of-sight of other teachers, advisors, aides, or parents. The children in the educational program of our congregation shall be under the care and supervision of two adults, one of whom may be a high school aide. An exception in the education department would exist if classes are so constructed as to provide constant visual access and frequent observation by the Associate Pastor for Children, Youth and Families or their designee (for example, another Pastor or the Chair of the Youth Faith Formation Ministry). There is no church-sanctioned event in our ministry that permits one adult to be alone with one child or youth for more than a rare brief period of time.

**Specific Guidelines for Adult Supervision:** Adult leaders for a youth ministry activity function as representatives of the church and as such are held to different standards than when acting as a parent or adult in their own family. The rules and guidelines of the church must be followed by all leaders at all events, thereby providing appropriate supervision for the youth. Supervision must be consistent, reasonable and prudent. Adults are encouraged to remember that they will be providing both supervision and modeling adult Christian behavior for the youth in their care, and should endeavor to see that the example they set is consistent with the value and expectations of the church community.

**Classrooms:** Windows (with shades open at all times) are required in all classroom doors. Absent a window in the nursery door, the top half of the door should be open at all times children are in the nursery. All activities will be kept in plain view.

**Five Year Separation Rule:** When utilizing high school and young adults as primary leaders in the Educational Department, Youth Programs and Off-site Activities they shall be at least five years older than any of the children or youth they supervise.

**Regarding Bathroom Supervision of Children:** Normally teachers, advisors, or aides who accompany a child to the bathroom, should remain outside the bathroom stall door while the child is inside. If a child needs assistance with zipping, buttoning, buckling, clean-up, wiping, etc., two adults need to be present, one of whom may be a high school aide. If anything unusual occurred during this assistance, a note describing the help given and persons present should be written and handed to the Associate Pastor for Children, Youth and Families or designee at the close of educational program day. If, for any reason, a teacher or aide is left

alone in a classroom, the teacher in the nearest or neighboring classroom should be so informed.

**Nursery Staff:** One may be a High School student (grades 9 through 12.) Diapering of infants and toddlers may be done in the nursery if two people are present, one of whom is an adult.

**Parental Consent:** Written parental or guardian consent is required when children or youth are involved in church sponsored activities away from the church facility.

**Discipline:** The purpose of discipline with children and youth is to maintain order in a manner consistent with the teaching of religious responsibility, respect and cooperation. No child shall be disciplined by the use of spanking, hitting, slapping, or any form of physical punishment. Verbal reprimands shall not include destructive criticism, insult or shouting. Teachers, advisors and aides and others helping in the classroom are encouraged to listen to the child, communicate expectations of appropriate behavior, use time-outs or give alternate choices. If a child is disruptive, a teacher or aide from the class or a neighboring class may be sent to locate the Associate Pastor for Children, Youth and Families or her/his designee. If the Associate Pastor for Children, Youth and Families or designee is not readily available, the child's parent should be contacted and brought to the room.

**Overnight Rule:** Any and all adult chaperones supervising overnight stays at our facilities or on congregational sponsored trips shall have been cleared to do so by the Associate Pastor for Children, Youth and Families or Senior Pastor. A minimum of one adult male will dorm with boys and one adult female with girls; and should these adults be husband and wife, a third adult advisor is to be present. In those situations where there is only one child per room, a second adult must be present. Further, a signed written consent form is required. Generally, digital gear such as mobile phones, e-readers, and electronic games will not be allowed on overnights, including during the travel time. Lights must be kept on except during specified sleeping hours. Overnights must have a designated lock time. Adult supervisors must actively seek to prevent inappropriate or abusive youth/youth behavior.

**Youth Group Activities:** Physical contact such as wrestling or other inappropriate high contact games are not acceptable recreational activity. No adult leader, staff or volunteer, should initiate or encourage physical or intimate contact with children or youth. Setting boundaries is the responsibility of the chaperone. The Youth Program is a group ministry. All participants are expected to remain with the group throughout the times listed in congregation publications.

**Leaving and Locking:** Situations where one adult and one youth or child are left at the facility's door waiting to be picked up by parents at the end of an activity are not allowed. Parents are encouraged to respect concluding times.

**Key Assignment:** Only church staff members and ministry chairs have keys to the church building.

**Pastoral Counseling for Children and Youth:** This policy applies to pastoral counseling (children and youth meeting with pastors must meet in an open space or with the door open). Continuing education of appropriate and ethical boundaries is required of all pastors.

**Drugs, Tobacco, Alcohol:** The use of any drugs, tobacco or alcoholic products on church property or in the church facility is not permitted during church sponsored children and youth activities.

**Transportation:** Transportation for field trips is provided to and from our church building only, unless we have written parental permission for a different pick up or drop off point.

**Parental Guidelines:** We strongly encourage parents, when on the premises with their children, to know at all times where their children are, who they are with, and what they are doing. It is

strongly encouraged that children 10 or under do not play in unsupervised areas.

**Social Media:** Carefully consider a relationship with youth in a social media setting (i.e. Facebook or Twitter). Youth will have access to “friends” or “followers” and content shared by your friends and/or followers may not always be appropriate. Refrain from private messaging within social media sites or playing games one-on-one within a site; this behavior can be compared to being a room with a door closed. It is appropriate, however, to set up a group Facebook page for a youth activity (such as an OWL class or youth mission trip) where many are invited to participate, including youth and adults. This can be a good way to share information, photos, etc. Set privacy settings to limit who can view the page. Again, refrain from private messaging within that page.

**E-mail and Texting:** Refrain from engaging in one-on-one messaging with youth. Instead, send group e-mails or texts or cc a parent. Save all communications with youth. If abuse is divulged electronically, follow standard reporting procedures.

**Visitors On-site:** Visitors are always welcome at Orchard Ridge United Church of Christ. The staff or volunteers serving our congregation shall be aware of who is visiting our facilities.

**Outside Groups Using Our Facilities:** Outside groups are welcome to use our facility, but they must be provided with a copy of our policies and sign that they have read and understand our policies. Additionally, they must sign a liability release form to release ORUCC from any potential legal action that may result from an accusation from within their outside program or activity, even if the incident was on ORUCC property.

**Reporting Responsibilities:** Any inappropriate conduct or relationship between an adult worker and a child or youth shall be promptly reported to the Senior Pastor, the Associate Pastor of Children, Youth and Families, the Moderator, or a Safe Sanctuary Advocacy Team Member.

**If You Suspect a Violation of the Code:** If a suspected case of abuse has either been reported to you or is suspected by you to have occurred at a congregational-related function or program, immediately contact the Senior Pastor or the Associate Pastor for Children, Youth and Families. In the case where this person cannot be reached, contact the Moderator. If the alleged abuser is the Senior Pastor or the Associate Pastor for Children, Youth and Families, report the allegation to the Moderator.

**Abuse can include, but is not limited to:**

- Sexual remarks
- Inappropriate kissing
- Fondling
- Touching parts of the body which would be covered by a swimsuit.
- Watching any sexual activity
- Intercourse
- Showing pornography
- Hitting
- Spanking
- Bullying
- If you are unsure whether or not your particular situation falls under this definition, it is strongly recommended that you err to the side of caution and report your suspicion immediately.