

SAFE SANCTUARIES POLICY

For Rush United Methodist Church

Rush, New York

In accordance with the policy of

The Upper New York Annual Conference of

The United Methodist Church

(1st Draft)

The following policy and procedures have been put in place, in accordance with the Upper New York Annual Conference of The United Methodist Church, by the Rush United Methodist Church of Rush, New York. These standard policies and procedures are intended to reduce the risk of abuse to children, youth, and vulnerable adults. A “vulnerable adult” is defined as any person, 18 years and older, who because of physical or mental infirmity or emotional disability or other physical, mental or emotional dysfunction may be vulnerable to maltreatment. Vulnerable adults are also those adults who work with children and youth who can be in a position where accusations of abuse could mistakenly arise; or, adults who have been abused either as a child or an adult. The purpose of this policy is to:

1. Provide for the safety of children, youth, and vulnerable adults in our church;
2. Provide safeguards for adults who work with children, youth, and vulnerable adults;
3. Hold accountable all those who minister in the name of Jesus Christ; and
4. Be diligent and good stewards of God’s resources provided to the church through spiritual gifts and material means of ministry.

The Rush United Methodist Church affirms the vision and purpose of The Upper New York Annual Conference. The vision is to live the gospel of Jesus Christ and to be God’s love with our neighbors in all places. The purpose is to grow in our relationship with God, be the body of Christ within the world, and live in accordance with the example of Jesus Christ by:

- ☐ Engaging, equipping and empowering our congregation to be in ministry with and to our Global Neighborhood;
- ☐ Encouraging and developing leadership within the laity and clergy that is diverse yet united by our love for Christ; and
- ☐ Building relationships with our neighbors, particularly with those who have been disenfranchised by mainstream society.

WHEREAS God has called us to make disciples of Jesus Christ with concern that our ministries safely protect children, youth, and vulnerable adults from abuse and exploitation; and

WHEREAS Jesus taught that *“Whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me,” (Mark 9:37 NRSV)* and *“If any of you put a stumbling block before one of these little*

ones... it would be better for you if a great millstone were fastened around your neck and you were drowned in the depth of the sea.”(Matthew 18:6 NRSV); and

WHEREAS The Social Principles of the United Methodist Church state that “...children must be protected from economic, physical, and sexual exploitation and abuse” (2008 The Book of Discipline paragraph 162C); and

WHEREAS at each child’s baptism, we affirm our responsibility to their safety by our congregational response, pledging: “*With God’s help, we will so order our lives after the example of Christ, that this child, surrounded by steadfast love, may be established in the faith, and confirmed and strengthened in the way that leads to eternal life*” (From The Book of Worship, Baptismal Covenant, Congregational Pledge II); and

WHEREAS as Disciples, we affirm Christ’s commandment to love our neighbors and serve as witnesses of Christ’s power to transform lives; and

WHEREAS the resolution “Reducing the Risk of Child Sexual Abuse in the Church” was adopted in 1996 and readopted in 2000, 2004 and 2008 (2008 Book of Resolutions, page 245, Paragraph 3084, Reducing the Risk of Child Sexual Abuse in the Church) by the General Conference of The United Methodist Church, thus becoming the impetus for all Annual Conferences and congregations to implement abuse prevention policies; and

WHEREAS The General Board of Discipleship has identified Safe Sanctuaries: Reducing the Risk of Child Sexual Abuse in the Church (Melton, Joy Thornburg, Copyright 2008 Discipleship Resources), as an official resource of The United Methodist Church equipping churches to develop a child and youth abuse prevention policy;

THEREFORE be it RESOLVED that we, Rush United Methodist Church in accordance with The Upper New York Annual Conference (UNYAC) of the United Methodist Church engage in the ministry of the Gospel in ways that assure the safety and spiritual growth of all in our care. To that end we covenant to:

1. Follow reasonable safety measures in the selection and recruitment of workers,
2. Implement prudent operational procedures in all program and events,
3. Educate all of our workers with children, youth and vulnerable adults regarding the use of appropriate policies and methods,
4. Have a clearly defined procedure for reporting a suspected incident of abuse that conforms to the requirements of state law and
5. Provide for crisis response, crisis intervention and media inquiries should an incident occur.

And be it FURTHER RESOLVED that Rush United Methodist Church in accordance with the Upper New York Annual Conference of the United Methodist Church have created this Safe Sanctuaries policy and the Board of Elders of the church shall be responsible for its implementation.

1. Rush United Methodist Church shall have a Safe Sanctuaries committee in place no later than March 2012.
2. The Safe Sanctuary Policy will be presented to the congregation on three occasions:
 - a. It will be presented in the July newsletter indicating that copies are available in the office.
 - b. It will be presented at the July quarterly conference
 - c. It will be presented in the August newsletter.
3. It will be presented at the November Church Conference to move ahead with.
4. A Three Person Review Committee will be appointed by the Board of Elders.
5. All forms will be approved and prepared for use.
6. A copy of the Rush United Methodist Church's Safe Sanctuary policy shall be on file in the Office of the Director of Connectional Ministries by December 5, 2012.
7. This policy shall be implemented by December 31, 2012.
8. The minimum standards and procedures contained in the Safe Sanctuaries policy shall be reviewed annually thereafter by the church's Charge Conference.

In conclusion, in all of our ministries with children, youth and vulnerable adults, Rush United Methodist Church, in accordance with The Upper New York Annual Conference, is committed to demonstrating the love of Jesus Christ so that each will be “. . . surrounded by steadfast love . . . established in the faith, and confirmed and strengthened in the way that leads to life eternal (Baptismal Covenant II, United Methodist Hymnal, page 44)

THE MINIMUM STANDARDS

The Minimum Standards set forth below have been established by the Rush United Methodist Church, in accordance with The Upper New York Annual Conference for all ministries. They are mandatory. They are not inspirational, but set minimum standards to protect children, youth, and vulnerable adults from abuse and exploitation. Without exception, these standards apply to all local churches/charges, district and annual conference ministries, and those who serve within.

Minimum Reasonable Safety Standards in Recruiting, Screening and Selecting Workers

Recruiting Workers

1. A written position description that includes the essential functions of the job shall be provided for positions in ministries with children, youth and vulnerable adults.

2. Interested workers shall complete an application that includes identification, address, employment history for the past five years, volunteer work during the past five years, experiences and skills specifically related to the position, prior church membership (if any), personal references (not related to the applicant) with complete address and contact information, waiver of any right to confidentiality and of any right to pursue damages against the church/charge caused by the references' responses, certification that the information provided is true and correct, voluntary disclosure of past criminal convictions, and authorization to conduct a criminal background check.

Screening Workers

1. References provided by the applicant shall be checked by the pastor or a designated Safe Sanctuaries committee/team member. The reference check shall include questions about the applicant's ability to work with children, youth or vulnerable adults (depending on ministry) and leadership ability.

2. A personal interview shall be conducted.

3. A criminal background check shall be authorized by and completed for all clergy, paid workers, and volunteers who have regular and direct contact with children, youth, and vulnerable adults. The criminal background check shall be performed after every seven (7) years of service and at the beginning of service and after a break in service of one or more years. Background check results shall be kept in a secure manner.

4. Adult volunteers shall demonstrate an active relationship with the local church/charge for at least six (6) months before being allowed to be in a supervisory role in activities for children, youth, or vulnerable adults.

Selecting Workers

1. Only workers that have successfully completed the application and screening process shall be eligible to be considered for selection to a ministry position with children, youth, and/or vulnerable adults.

2. In the event that the criminal background check reveals a conviction or other cause for concern, the pastor and/or another ministry leader shall consult with the applicant.

3. Adults convicted of child abuse or named as the perpetrator in a founded or indicated child abuse report through a designated state or county agency, or who are under investigation for, or who have charges pending for child abuse, shall not be accepted as paid employees or volunteers to have direct access to children, youth, or vulnerable adults in any church-sponsored activity or setting.

Procedures for Conducting Ministry Programs and Events for Children, Youth and Vulnerable Adults

1. Adult staff and volunteers and clergy shall observe the “Two-Adult Rule” at all times so that no adult is ever alone with children or youth or vulnerable adults at a church/charge, district or conference-sponsored event or activity. The two-adult rule requires that regardless of the size of the group, there shall always be two unrelated adults present. This may include the presence of an adult “roamer” who moves in and out of rooms/ministry activities. No child, youth, or vulnerable adult shall be left unsupervised while attending a ministry program or event.
2. Adult staff and volunteers are those *who are at least 18 years old and who are at least five years older than the oldest minor present*, whom they are leading, ministering to or supervising. Youth (those ages 13-17) are invited to assist adult volunteers but are not to be considered an adult for the “two-adult rule”.
3. All adult staff and volunteers and clergy shall be observant for unusual behaviors and signs of child, youth, and vulnerable adult abuse and shall report them immediately to the appropriate supervisor.
4. All adult staff and volunteers and clergy working with children, youth, and vulnerable adults shall receive a copy of the applicable local church/charge, district or conference ministry or program Safe Sanctuaries Policy before starting their service and shall agree to covenant with the (local) United Methodist Church, District or Conference ministry or program to fully cooperate with these abuse prevention strategies. Training in the policy is required before beginning ministry with children, youth, and vulnerable adults. An annual review of the policy and its updates is also required.
5. All ministry activities shall occur in open view. Each room or space where ministry events occur must be open to public view. This may require enclosed spaces such as classrooms, having a viewing window, a glass panel in the door, a half door configuration or an open door.

6. Written attendance records shall be kept for all ministry events/activities involving children and youth. These records shall include at a minimum, the date and names of all participants and shall be kept until Jesus returns (perpetuity).
7. Ministry activities involving transportation shall require a written permission slip/form signed by a parent/guardian. Drivers of children, youth and vulnerable adults must be 21 years of age. The ministry supervisor shall be required to keep a copy of their current license and proof of insurance card on file with the appropriate ministry program.
8. Under NO circumstances will an adult be alone in a car with only one child to, from, or during a church / youth activity, including worship services and regular youth group meetings.
9. During off site activities that require an overnight stay, every effort will be made to have two adults of the same sex in the room with the youth of that gender. However, if that is not possible, youth will be split by gender and their safety will be monitored by all adults present.
10. If a “one-on-one” counseling session is necessary, a roaming adult will be notified of the location in which the discussion is taking place and will monitor the meeting from outside the room.
11. Facilities shall be free from conditions that pose a safety or health hazard to the participants.
12. Appointed clergy shall regularly review and be familiar with public sex offenders registries maintained by New York State law enforcement agencies. This is done by accessing:
http://criminaljustice.state.ny.us/SomsSUBDirectory/search_index.jsp

REPORTING AND RESPONSE

Reporting shall be required by any staff or volunteer that personally witnesses an incident of abuse or exploitation, when an allegation of an event of abuse or exploitation is made to staff or a volunteer by a third party and/or when a child, youth, or vulnerable adult discloses abuse or exploitation to a staff member or volunteer. It is crucial that reporting be immediate and the allegations dealt with as soon in time as possible to the incident or disclosure.

1. The staff person or volunteer who observes alleged abuse or to whom such abuse is reported or disclosed, or who suspects abuse shall be required to report the incident/suspected abuse **immediately** to the person in charge of the ministry/activity. Upon receiving the

information, the person in charge of the ministry/activity shall **immediately** call the New York State Child Protective Services Hotline at (800) 342-3720. Identification information for the alleged victim and the adult responsible for their care is required for the report. The pastor in charge and immediate staff supervisor are to be informed immediately before or subsequent to the making of a report. The person in charge of the ministry/activity in which the alleged abuse was observed or disclosed shall immediately attempt to obtain necessary information such as the name of the alleged victim and his/her address and family information.

2. If the accused is the appointed clergy, supply pastor or a member of his/her family, the allegations shall be immediately reported to the District Superintendent. The District Superintendent shall immediately report to the proper authorities as set forth in paragraph above. The District Superintendent shall take responsibility and act according to the established rules in The Book of Discipline with respect to claims against the pastor. If the District Superintendent is not available, the incident shall be reported to the Bishop's office.

3. All clergy are included in mandatory reporting as required by The Book of Discipline. (The Book of Discipline of The United Methodist Church ¶341.5, all clergy of The United Methodist Church are charged to maintain all confidences inviolate, including confessional confidences, except in cases of suspected child abuse or neglect or in cases where mandatory reporting is required by civil law.)

4. After the person in charge of the ministry/activity has reported the suspected abuse to the proper authorities, the appointed clergy/supply pastors shall report the incident immediately to the District Superintendent. If the District Superintendent is not available, the incident shall be reported to the Bishop's office.

5. The person in charge of the ministry/event must keep a written report of the steps taken by the church/charge in response to the reported abuse. The report should be kept brief and contain only factual information relevant to the situation. This report should be kept in a secure place. It should be written or typed to prevent it from being changed.

6. **NEVER** discuss allegations with any other people except law enforcement or designated county investigators. To do so can cause irreparable harm to the victim, their family, the church/conference and community.

RESPONSE PLAN

A quick, compassionate and unified response to an alleged incident of abuse is expected. All allegations shall be taken seriously. In all cases of reported or observed abuse there shall be cooperation with all official investigating agencies.

1. All media requests for statements shall be directed to the Annual Conference Director of Communications.
2. Take all allegations seriously and reach out to the victim and the victim's family. Show care and support to help prevent further hurt. Extend whatever pastoral resources are needed. Remember that the care and safety of the victim is the **first** priority. Respond in a positive and supportive manner to the victim and the victim's family.
3. Immediately, and with dignity and respect for the sacred worth of the accused, remove the accused from further involvement with children, youth, or vulnerable adults and advise the accused that there has been an allegation of abuse. Details of the allegations of the abuse should not be discussed with the accused at the time of the removal. In any removal of a staff member or volunteer from any activity/ministry, care shall be taken to handle the removal in a discreet manner, recognizing that there will be an investigation by either state or church authorities, or both.
4. When it has been alleged that a member of the church staff or volunteer, has committed an act of abuse or exploitation, the staff member or volunteer shall be required to refrain from all ministry/activities with children, youth, and vulnerable adults until the incident has been fully resolved by the appropriate state authorities and/or in accordance with The Book of Discipline.
5. Notify the parents/guardians or the victim and take whatever steps are necessary to assure the safety and well being of the child, youth, or vulnerable adult until the parent(s)/guardian(s) arrive. **NOTE:** If one or both of the parents is the alleged abuser, follow the advice of the authorities concerning notifications of others.
6. The church/charge shall provide a supportive atmosphere to all those who are affected, offering both objectivity and empathy as it seeks to create a climate in which healing may take place.