

# **SAFE SANCTUARY POLICY AND PROCEDURES FOR HICKORY RIDGE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH**

## **INTRODUCTION**

In keeping with the resolution adopted by the General Conference of the United Methodist Church in April 1996 and the Biblical teachings and the traditions and beliefs of the United Methodist Church, we the congregation of Hickory Ridge United Methodist Church adopt the following policy and procedures so as to provide a safe sanctuary for children and youth.

## **PURPOSE**

The Hickory Ridge United Methodist Church adopts the following policy and procedures to provide a safe and secure environment within the church and for any event that is connected with the ministries and operations of this church. While the primary reason for this policy is to prevent abuse and neglect of children and youth, it has been adopted to protect all who enter our doors.

## **STATEMENT OF COVENANT AND POLICY**

As a Christian community of faith the Hickory Ridge United Methodist Church pledges to conduct the ministry of the gospel in ways that assure the safety and spiritual growth of our children, youth, and adults as well as all children, youth, and adult workers. We as a congregation pledge our utmost to protect all who enter our doors by adopting the following procedures. The procedures are designed to prevent any type of child, youth, or adult abuse, neglect or exploitation as defined by the General Statutes of North Carolina. These can be specifically found in Chapters 7, 7A, 7B, and 14 of the North Carolina Criminal Law and Procedure. Nothing in this policy or procedure is designed to hinder or prevent the investigation of suspected, reported or confirmed violations of any North Carolina Criminal Laws.

## **PROCEDURES**

While the following are the basic procedures to insure a safe physical and emotional environment, there is a need for common sense procedures in dealing with hazardous conditions.

1. All lead teachers and those who supervise, directly or indirectly, children or youth **MUST** be at least 18 years of age and a member in good standing for at least 6 months. A youth (a member in good standing for at least 6 months) at least 5 years older than the child/youth being supervised may be a "helper".
2. All teachers supervising children/youth **MUST** have a complete criminal background check from local and, when appropriate, state and national law enforcement agencies. (These may be provided by law-enforcement agencies if available or by the use of an approved investigative agency, such as Castle Branch who has a

discount arrangement with United Methodist Churches in Western North Carolina.) Effective 2/1/04, all paid employees of the church will be required to have a criminal background check. The Staff-Parish Relations Committee must check out all references for paid staff.

3. All classrooms or areas being used by children/youth should have a glass panel to allow for outside monitoring. This panel must allow monitoring of all spaces within the classroom or area. In addition, one person must be designated as a “roamer” and should make unscheduled visits to check on all classrooms or areas. This person will be the superintendent of Sunday School or a designee. If a children/youth activity is held in any room not having a window in the door, then the door to the room must remain fully open during all aspects of the activity.
4. “Rule of Two”: When possible, a minimum of two persons should be present for any church sponsored program or event involving children/youth. If the rule of two is not possible, the door to the classroom must remain open or have a glass panel. The Roamer rule should also be followed. In no instance should the two teachers/supervisors be from the same immediate family.
5. The Pastor’s Study should have a small glass window in it, as well as any other room where pastoral counseling or consultation is common. An open-door policy may also be used when necessary. Pastoral counseling is expected to be confidential in nature, but it is preferred that such sessions take place where other people are nearby even though not within hearing distance.
6. All paid or volunteer teaching/supervising staff working with children/youth **MUST** be trained before teaching or supervising in the safe sanctuary policy and procedures. Thereafter, all teachers/supervisors should be re-trained every three years. This training may be provided by the individual churches, District, or Conference training programs. It will be the responsibility of the Pastor or his/her designee to ensure that training takes place. All adult volunteers and staff shall sign a pledge to follow this policy and these procedures prior to being permitted to participate in activities with children/youth and renew this pledge yearly.
7. Any teaching or educational experience that requires travel from the church or overnight travel **MUST** have the approval of the Pastor, Sunday School Superintendent, and the written permission of the parent or guardian of the child/youth. The “Rule of two” must be followed with no exceptions.
8. It is encouraged that any child/youth needing assistance in the restroom be accompanied by a parent or guardian. When this is not possible, the door to the restroom should be kept open or ajar with as much privacy as possible being provided for the child/youth.
9. A surveillance camera had been installed to monitor the education building hallway during Worship Service; therefore, the entrance door to that building will be left unlocked and accessible.

10. Children/Youth at all times MUST be supervised by a responsible person (at least 18 years of age and 5 years older than those being supervised to lessen the likelihood of any situation that could result in injury, abuse, or neglect. (Numbers 3 and 4 above should be followed.)

11. Any suspected or reported case of neglect or abuse should be reported immediately to the Grievance Committee (consisting of the Pastor, Sunday School Superintendent, Lay Leader, Administrative Council chair, and the Pastor-Parish Relations Committee chair). In the event that the Pastor is implicated, the chair of the Administrative Council or the Sunday School Superintendent MUST notify the District Superintendent as soon as possible.

The Pastor and/or the Sunday School Superintendent MUST immediately cause an incident report to be filled out with all available details. The District Superintendent should be notified by the next business day when possible. It will then be the decision of the District Superintendent, Pastor, and Sunday School Superintendent as to the appropriate action to be taken. The District Superintendent shall have final local authority in the matter. However, in no event shall any of the above fail to report substantiated abuse or neglect to the proper law enforcement or social service agency as required by North Carolina Law.

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Approved by Administrative Council February 2, 2004. Revised policy and addendum were approved by Administrative Council December 1, 2009.