

**INDIANA ANNUAL CONFERENCE – THE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH
ABUSE PROTECTION POLICY - FOR CHILDREN, YOUTH, AND VULNERABLE ADULTS**

The Indiana Annual Conference is committed to the well being of every person entrusted to its care as well as those entrusted to the care of local United Methodist Churches in all of Indiana. Our calling is to provide safe sanctuary for all of God’s people including our children, youth and vulnerable adults. Indiana United Methodists affirm that all children, youth and vulnerable adults have the right to expect safe sanctuary.

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)*

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 162 C.

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 life eternal.” (From The Book of Worship, Baptismal Covenant, Congregational Pledge II)*

As Disciples, we affirm Christ’s commandment to love our neighbors. We also serve as witnesses of Christ’s power to transform lives. Building on these foundations, we recognize that our faith calls us to offer hospitality and protection to all persons.

GUIDELINES FOR LOCAL CHURCH ABUSE PROTECTION POLICIES

We strongly encourage every church in the Indiana Annual Conference to develop and follow its own Abuse Protection Policy. Such policies protect children and vulnerable individuals as well as the volunteers and staff who serve them. Each church is encouraged to prepare a policy that best fits its congregational setting. An abuse protection policy and its accompanying implementation procedures should include the following elements:

- a. A description of the role staff and lay members who work with children and vulnerable adults;
- b. Procedures to be used in recruitment and selection of all employees and volunteers who will work with or have regular access to children, youth, and vulnerable adults;
- c. A plan for training all employees and volunteers about all aspects of the protection policy, including provisions for routine re-training;
- d. Procedures designed to reduce the risk of instance of abuse of any type and assure that instances of real or suspected abuse are promptly detected and reported to the appropriate internal and external authorities;
- e. A procedure for reporting incidents of known and suspected abuse of children, youth

- or vulnerable adults to appropriate church leaders, including district leadership, and to appropriate civil authorities in accordance with the laws of Indiana;
- f. Information about resources and strategies for adults who have questions about the policy or who confront situations that make them uncomfortable;
 - g. A plan to provide for the safety, protection, and ongoing emotional support of those who may have been victimized;
 - h. A plan for reporting known or suspected incidents of abuse to family members, the congregation and the public, as appropriate, while protecting those involved;
 - i. A plan for dealing with allegations against a church worker, church employee, or church volunteer; and
 - j. Annual review of the protection policy and procedures and of the church's liability coverage for employees and volunteers.

A copy of the local church policy should be on file in the church and District Office.

Administrative bodies of the local church shall be responsible for implementing and monitoring their own policy and accompanying procedures.

RESOURCES

The Abuse Protection Policy adopted for Annual Conference events and ministries may be considered as one example for developing your church policy and procedures. We also recommend the following as valuable tools to assist you in this process:

Melton, Joy. Safe Sanctuaries: Reducing the Risk of Abuse in the Church for Children. Nashville, 2008. In this book you will find suggestions and guidelines to aid you in creating your policy including sample forms for screening workers; requesting background checks; checking references; and reporting suspected abuse. For a complete list of resources go to The General Board of Discipleship website: www.gbod.org/safeSanctuary.

Each local church is responsible for establishing and implementing its own Abuse Protection policy. Additionally, Discipleship Resources, The United Methodist Church, and the Indiana Conference of the United Methodist Church do not engage in the practice of law or accounting. Churches should consult professional advisors when creating and implementing internal policies, including an Abuse Protection policy.

ABUSE PROTECTION POLICY OF THE INDIANA CONFERENCE UMC FOR CONFERENCE OR DISTRICT EVENTS AND PROGRAM AGENCIES

The Indiana Annual Conference has established the following policy in order to provide safe sanctuary for all of God's people including our children, youth and vulnerable adults. This policy applies to all staff and volunteers, clergy or lay, who have contact with or responsibility for children, youth, or vulnerable adults at conference and/or district sponsored events. Each conference and/or district ministry involving children, youth, or vulnerable adults shall adopt procedures for training and certifying employees and volunteers that minimally include the procedures and certification listed in this policy.

DEFINITIONS

1. **Neglect.** A child or vulnerable person's physical or mental condition is seriously impaired or endangered as a result of the inability, refusal, or neglect of a parent, guardian, or custodian to supply the person with necessary food, clothing, shelter, medical care, education or supervision.
2. **Abuse.** A child or vulnerable person's physical or mental health is seriously endangered due to injury by the act or omission of a parent, guardian, or custodian.
3. **Sex Abuse.** A child or vulnerable person is the victim of a sex offense (rape, criminal deviate conduct, child molestation, exploitation, seduction, sexual misconduct with a minor, public indecency, prostitution or incest). For purposes of this policy, sex abuse is also defined to include possession or viewing of obscene, explicit, or pornographic material in the proximity of a child or vulnerable person.
4. **Ritual Abuse.** Abuse in which physical, sexual, or psychological violations of a child are inflicted regularly, intentionally, and in a stylized way by a person or persons responsible for the child's welfare.
5. **Staff.** Includes any clergy person, any paid employee of the conference or a district, and any paid employee of any group, committee, team or agency of the conference or a district if responsible for the care or supervision of a participant at an Annual Conference or District event.
6. **Volunteer.** Any non-clergy, lay worker who is responsible for the care or supervision of children, youth or vulnerable adult participants at an Annual Conference or District event. This may include paid staff members of a local church who are acting as volunteers for purpose of the Conference or District event.
7. **Participants.** Children, youth, or vulnerable adults who are registered, enrolled, attending or otherwise participating in an event or activity sponsored by the Annual Conference or a District.

8. **Conference/District Ministry or Event.** Include ministries or events planned and supervised by the appointed staff and/or volunteers of the Annual Conference or a district of the Annual Conference.
9. **Protected Persons.** Include children, youth and vulnerable adults.
10. **Vulnerable Adults.** Are persons over 18 years of age with physical, mental and/or developmental disabilities.
11. **Children.** Are persons 0-11 years of age.
12. **Youth.** Are 12-18 years of age.

CERTIFICATION FOR STAFF / VOLUNTEERS

1. **Age Requirement.** Adults and some youth are able to serve as volunteers at Conference and District events. All volunteers must be at least 15 years of age. Volunteers under the age of 18 must work with and under the supervision of an adult volunteer. In all cases, volunteers and staff must be at least five years older than the oldest children or youth that they are responsible for supervising.
2. **Volunteer Certification.** All conference and district event leaders, staff, and volunteers must submit a written application/screening form and references annually. A background screening, including the National Sex Offender Registry and Multi-State Felony Background check, is required annually for all conference and district event staff and volunteers over the age of 18 and must be completed prior to working with children or youth at a conference or district event. Staff/volunteers from outside of the United States of America or without a social security number for whom a background screening cannot be completed must be verified by reference checks and allowed to work under the supervision of a properly certified adult.
3. No applicant with a criminal conviction for any crime against a person, including but not limited to crimes against or including children, sexual misconduct or use or abuse of alcohol or drugs may serve as a Conference or District volunteer in any capacity that involves direct contact with or supervision of children, youth or vulnerable adults.
4. Prior to serving at an event as a conference or district volunteer, volunteers must have been active participants in a local church or ministry for a minimum of one year, or must serve under the supervision of a conference certified adult volunteer.
5. Staff and volunteers must complete the conference approved training program prior to serving as a Conference or District volunteer. Training must be renewed annually.

SCREENING FOR STAFF/VOLUNTEERS

Conference and District ministry groups shall be responsible for implementing screening and certification procedures for Conference and District staff and volunteers.

When adults come to a conference or district event with youth or children from their local church, those adults are considered adult participants. They are not considered conference or district volunteers. For adult participants, the local church is responsible for screening those adults and must attest that at minimum a background screening consistent with this policy has been performed on every adult participant attending.

TRAINING

Conference and District ministry groups must provide conference-approved training to group and team members who work directly with children, youth, and vulnerable adults. That training shall include, but not be limited to, the following elements: familiarization with this policy, recognizing the signs of abuse; avoiding situations when abuse might take place or conduct which could be perceived as abusive; reporting requirements of the State of Indiana related to abuse; the policy for responding to an allegation; and communication procedures.

REPORTING OF INCIDENTS FOR STAFF AND VOLUNTEERS

Suspected Abuse Case: If any staff or volunteer has reason to believe a Protected Person is the victim of any form of abuse or neglect, either from information provided by the Protected Person or others or from visual observation, you have a moral and legal obligation to report that to the Event Coordinator . Be prepared to share the following information:

- a. Name, address, and phone number of the Protected Person.
- b. Details about the information you received or your visual observations.
- c. Your name, address and phone number.

You and the Event Coordinator must immediately work together to make sure the Protected Person is not in immediate danger. The Event Coordinator will **immediately** make a report to Child Protective Services, Adult Protective Services, or law enforcement and notify the appropriate persons, including family members of the child or youth, the home church pastor(s), and/or other conference officials. You will be notified after a report has been made to the appropriate authorities.

If you believe a report has not been made to the appropriate authorities after you notified the Event Coordinator, you must report the alleged abuse or neglect of a child or youth by calling the Indiana Child Abuse Hotline 800-800-5556 (or a local authority – the local number for each county listed at the CPS website <http://www.in.gov/dcs/2372.htm>) or the alleged abuse or neglect of a vulnerable adult by calling the Adult Protective Services State Hotline 800-992-6978.

Once you have notified the Event Coordinator or, if necessary, made your report, you must cooperate with local authorities if it is found that the person is indeed in danger. This could

include interviews, sworn statements, or court appearances. For your records and reference, you should use the “Suspected Abuse documentation” to document the occurrence.

Reporting An Allegation: Any allegation about conference staff or volunteers must be taken seriously. An allegation can come before, during, or after the event from anyone.

If any staff or volunteer receives an allegation about the behavior of conference staff or a volunteer, follow the reporting procedures above. You may ask the person reporting the incident to accompany you to the Event Coordinator. If that person declines, you must take the concern/allegation to the Event Coordinator, who will facilitate filling out a “report of incident” form. The Event Coordinator must **immediately** make a report to Child Protective Services, Adult Protective Services, or local law enforcement.

If an allegation is made during an event, the accused staff/volunteer must be removed from service until the situation can be investigated and resolved.

In all cases, regardless of the identity of the accused, the Event Coordinator must make a written report to the Associate Director or Director **and** the District Superintendent after he or she has made a report to Child Protective Services, Adult Protective Services, or law enforcement.

STATEMENT TO THE MEDIA

No communication with public media should be made. The Conference Director of Communications shall provide conference and district ministry groups with guidelines for communications with media, and all media communications should be coordinated through him or her.

AFTER CARE

Following any report of incident, the event director/coordinator shall work with conference staff, the District Superintendent, and the local church to provide ongoing support and care for all involved.