

Safe Sanctuary Policy
Langdale United Methodist Church
Adopted and revised August 5, 2013

Introduction

Langdale United Methodist Church seeks to create a safe environment for children and youth in which opportunities for abuse are minimized by the provision of proper enlistment and supervision of those persons working with them. This document contains theological foundations, definitions of child abuse, policies and procedures related to prevention, response, and reporting.

Theological Foundation

Our Biblical Mandate: “Then Jesus took a little child and put her in his arms, he said to them, ‘Whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me, and whoever welcomes me welcomes not me but the one who sent me.’” (paraphrase of Mark 9:36-37) Jesus also said, “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)

Our Commitment in Baptism: The Church, above all institutions, is called to welcome and nurture the child. Our goal is to maintain a safe, secure, loving place where children may grow and where those who care for them may administer to their needs in responsible ways.

Our Mandate: The 1996 General Conference approved a resolution that called upon local churches and annual conferences to institute policies and procedures to reduce the risk of child sexual abuse in our churches and church-related activities. We, the Langdale United Methodist Church, accept the nature of this call and seek to expand it to include all forms of child abuse or neglect that could be possible in these settings or that could come to our attention regarding children in our care.

Statement of Covenant: We uphold the idea that to report abuse is to be a witness to the world of the love and justice of God and fully recognize that reporting abuse is a form of ministering to the needs of those crying out for help. Simply, to report abuse can help to stop existing and prevent further abuse. As caring Christians, we are also committed to protect and advocate for children and youth participating in the life of the church. The Church, at all levels of its organization, is entrusted with the responsibility of providing an emotionally and physically safe, spiritually grounded, healthy environment for children and youth in which they are protected from abuse. Further, we recognize the grace that God gives in upholding Christian community; and we will look for grace-filled ways of dealing with both the victim and the accused.

Definitions

Child – a person under 18 years of age (26-16.2, Alabama Code 1975)

Conference -- The North Alabama Conference of the United Methodist Church

Volunteer – a person 18 years of age or older who assists in conducting children’s activities under the supervision of a staff person

Paid staff – any person employed by Langdale United Methodist Church who is responsible for activities involving children or youth

Child abuse – harm or threatened harm to a child's health or welfare by a person responsible for the child's health or welfare or by a person in a position of trust, which harm occurs or is threatened through non-accidental physical or mental injury or sexual (26-16-2, Alabama Code 1975)

Sexual Abuse – any touching of the sexual or other intimate parts of a child or any other conduct or action done for the purpose of gratifying the sexual desire of either party either (1) through physical force that overcomes earnest resistance or a threat, express or implied, that places a child in fear of immediate death or serious physical injury to himself or another person, or (2) by a person 18 years or older against another who is less than 16 years old, or by a person four or more years older than the victim (13A-6-60, 13A-6-66 Alabama Code 1975)

Neglect – harm to a child's health or welfare by a person responsible for the child's health or welfare which occurs through negligent treatment, including the failure to provide adequate food, clothing, shelter, or medical care (26-16-2, Alabama Code 1975)

Verbal abuse – spoken or unspoken violence or emotional cruelty against a child

Ritual Abuse – regular intentional physical, sexual, or psychological violations of a child to appeal to a higher authority of power

Screening Procedures for Volunteers and Paid Staff working with Children and Youth

All persons who intend to work with children at church-related events, including overnight or longer events, must also be properly screened and attend an age-appropriate orientation/training session on child protection and abuse and have a current background check.

Screening and Supervisory Procedures and Policies

- Written job description and/or expectations provided and must be signed and dated.
- An application/personal information form shall be completed. It will include: name, address, date of birth, race, phone number, emergency contact information, gifts, skills, relevant experience/training, education, two work-related references, church membership and number of years, pastor's name and phone number and a brief statement of reason for seeking position.
- Must complete and sign consent form authorizing criminal background check.
- A background check should be provided for anyone staying overnight or longer, i.e. weekend retreats, summer camps. Background checks must be renewed every three years.
- Personal interviews with summary documentation will be conducted by church staff representative and kept in a confidential file maintained in the church office.
- References will be checked with summary documentation in a confidential file and maintained in the church office.

Guidelines for Volunteer and Paid Staff working with Children and Youth at church-related events:

- Person should be at least five (5) years older than the age group with whom they are to work.
- Persons leading a group or children or youth should be eighteen (18) years of age or older.
- Six-month rule: any volunteer working with children must be a member or attend regularly Langdale United Methodist Church for at least six months.
- Two-adult rule: Two non-related adults must always be present in groups of children except in emergency situations and where not reasonably feasible.
- When the two-adult rule is not feasible, the adult supervisor will be required to spot check or make unannounced visits as necessary.
- Doors are never to be locked and are to remain open unless equipped with windows. Staff and Volunteers will avoid being alone with a child without being visible to others in the immediate surroundings.
- Again, all paid staff and volunteers will be required to read and sign that they understand the guidelines for working with children/youth at church events.

Overnight trips/events: Adult chaperones with children/youth must be the same gender, must never share a bed with a child/youth or be alone in the room with them at any time. Large room multiple bunk settings allow two same gender adults to sleep with children/youth. All parents/leaders should have documented contact information exchange and event information.

Transportation recommendations: All drivers should be screened including a review of their motor vehicle record. If using church bus, trustee guidelines for use of church owned vehicles should be followed. When using private vehicles for church-related events, adult must provide updated insurance and follow the two adult rule in each vehicle. All children/youth must provide a permission/liability form with emergency information signed by their parent/guardian. These are to be kept with the leader at all times during the travel event. ***No one will be permitted to drive who has had his/her driver's license revoked.***

Counseling sessions: When counseling children or youth, the door of the room used shall remain open for the entire session.

Reporting Procedures

With the exception of child daycare or school programs within the church setting, the Alabama statute on mandated reporting of suspected child abuse/neglect does not specifically require a faith-based ministry to report child abuse. The law does, however, encourage voluntary reporting and the Conference supports and encourages voluntary reporting. In keeping with Christian beliefs that children should not be abused or neglected, Langdale United Methodist Church will practice an advocate voluntary compliance with the Alabama statute on reporting of known or suspected abuse/neglect of children. Allegations of suspected abuse/neglect will be reported to the Department of Human Resources and local law enforcement.

- Confidentiality will be of the utmost importance. It will be on a to-know basis only.

- All allegations will be taken seriously and action will be taken in accordance with the laws of the State of Alabama, insurance policy requirements, and legal advice of counsel.
- The official spokesperson for the church in any of these matters will be the **Pastor** and his/her appointee. No other staff members or church members shall speak to the media in an official capacity.
- The pastor and/or appointee will document, in writing with date and signature, all efforts in the handling of any incident.
- The church will not deny, minimize, or blame any individual involved in the allegations. Langdale United Methodist Church will seek to minister to all involved, as well as cooperate with authorities.
- When the occurrence of child abuse on church property or in a church-related event is suspected, the following procedures will be followed:
 1. Anyone who suspects that a child's physical or mental health or welfare has been or may be adversely affected by abuse or neglect will review with the pastor the situation he/she has observed.
 2. The pastor will immediately inform the Chairperson of the Staff-Parish Relations Committee of the allegation.
 3. The pastor will immediately inform the District Superintendent of the allegation, including all information about the event.
 4. If the allegations concern a member of the clergy, the District Superintendent will be informed directly and immediately.
 5. All allegations will be reported to the appropriate law enforcement authorities as is required by state law.
 6. The pastor will commence the investigation immediately and conclude it as soon as possible.
 7. Any accuse employee will be suspended (with pay) from the performance of duties involving children/youth pending completion of the investigation.
 8. The church and all its employees will cooperate fully with law enforcement officials.
 9. The pastor will notify the parents of the child/youth potentially involved in the alleged abuse, inform them of the steps the church has taken, and continue to keep them advised of the status of the investigation.
 10. If child abuse is confirmed, the victim and the victim's family will be asked what action they would like to take in the matter. Langdale United Methodist Church will fully cooperate to address their request within the bounds of a legal and prudent response (church legal counsel will assist in this determination).
 11. In instances where child abuse is confirmed, the church will immediately dismiss the worker from that position.
 12. Langdale United Methodist Church will cooperate with appropriate law enforcement officials in any prosecution of persons when child abuse is confirmed.
 13. In instances where the evidence is inconclusive, the Pastor and the Chairman of the Staff-Parish Relations Committee will, at their discretion, take action depending on the strength of the evidence

available and with consideration given the request of the victim and the victim's family.

14. The congregation will be kept informed of the investigation with respect to non-confidential matters in order that the congregation will hear about the investigation from within the church rather than from the news media or community sources.

Policy and Procedure Review

The Safe Sanctuary Policy will be reviewed and updated, as needed, annually by the Child Protection Policy Committee, the Administrative Board, and the North Alabama Conference.

Amendment of Policy

The Administrative Board of Langdale United Methodist Church must approve any and all amendments of the policy.

Effective Date

This policy will be effective on August 5, 2013.

Conclusion

In all of our ministries with children and youth, the congregation of Langdale United Methodist Church is committed to demonstrating the love of Jesus Christ so that each child 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*, p. 44).