

**SAFE SANCTUARY POLICY**  
Northwest Texas Annual Conference  
Of The United Methodist Church

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**OUR CALLING AND OUR MANDATE IS TO ENSURE SAFE SANCTUARY FOR GOD'S PEOPLE**

Throughout the gospels, Jesus provides teachings on providing a peaceable kingdom for all of God's people. The peaceable kingdom begins with sanctuary.

Scriptures provide examples of how sanctuary is to be a community of protective nurture and harmony (Psalms 20:1-2, 27:4-5). As Followers of Christ, we are called to create a safe sanctuary in our churches. They must be holy, safe, and protective communities for all of God's children, regardless of age or ability. The purpose of this policy is to address the safety of everyone at all local churches and at District or Conference sponsored events. The Northwest Texas Conference of The United Methodist Church recognizes the need to have a formal, written policy with procedures in place (1) to help prevent the opportunity for the occurrence and the appearance of abuse and (2) to help protect workers from false accusations and suspicions.

*The following policy and procedures are not based on a lack of trust in hired staff or volunteers, but are intended to protect the entire church body regardless of age. Careful and confidential documentation is essential to show compliance with policies, to verify information as needed, and to have an accurate record in the case of reported abuse.*

**Scope of Conference Policy**

For protection and well being, this policy and its provisions shall apply to all paid and unpaid leaders, whether lay or clergy who have any direct or indirect contact with all people who participate in any activities or events sponsored by the Northwest Texas Conference and its Districts. Further, each local church must adopt a Safe Sanctuary policy for their church by December 31, 2008 and submit the policy to their District Superintendent and The Northwest Texas Conference Office. This Conference policy is effective as of May 31, 2007 for all Conference and District events.

The Northwest Texas Conference policy shall be applicable at all Conference and District activities. Examples include, but are not limited to the following: All Summer Camps, District/Conference Trips, District/Conference Retreats, District/Conference Leadership Meetings, All District/Conference Mission Trips and Projects.

**Definition of Childcare Provider, Assistant Leader, Leader, Child and Youth at Conference and District Events**

A Childcare Provider is someone that is eighteen (18) years of age or older with a high school diploma or equivalent.

An Assistant Leader is someone 18-20 years of age with a high school diploma or equivalent, who is supervised by a leader.

A Leader is someone who is twenty-one (21) years of age or older.

A Child is anyone from birth, to the end of the 5<sup>th</sup> grade in school.

A Youth is anyone from the 6<sup>th</sup> grade to the 12<sup>th</sup> grade in school.

**Supervision**

To achieve compliance with the Safe Sanctuary policy it may be necessary to combine groups; recruit, train, and reference additional volunteers; or cancel an event. Recognizing that there is safety in numbers, children and youth will be instructed to use the "buddy system." There should be present at least one Leader who is trained and certified in First Aid and CPR at all Conference and District events.

Supervision for Nursery/childcare at Conference and District events:

- There shall be a minimum of two (2) Childcare Providers per room.
- We recommend that whenever possible State Childcare Minimum Standards shall be followed, particularly in relation to the number of Childcare Providers to child ratio.

Supervision of children and youth at designated Conference and District events:

- Designated Conference and District events shall observe the "2 Leader Rule" (2 leaders per classroom or 2 leaders within line of sight when outdoors.) at all times.
- An exception to allow 1 Leader and 1 Assistant Leader may be made with the approval of the event Leader on a case-by-case basis.
- Any one-to-one mentoring or consulting of Children or Youth shall not be conducted "behind closed doors" or in an isolated area out of sight of another Leader.
- Understanding that there is safety in numbers, one Leader can be in contact with groups of three or more Youth (6th-12th grade) so long as they are in line of sight of other Leaders.
- If both boys and girls are participants, then the Leaders shall also include both men and women.
- Unauthorized visitors will not be allowed to remain at the event.
- Children will not be allowed to leave a designated event early unless a parent or guardian accompanies them as they leave. Youth participants in an event will not be allowed to leave a designated event early without the permission of a parent or guardian.

## **Overnight Accommodations**

At events that require overnight accommodations:

- It is strongly advised that in camp or dormitory type settings there be at least two (2) Leaders present with every group of Children/Youth.
- When staying in a hotel, Leaders shall sleep in separate rooms from Children/Youth; or if necessary for Children/Youth to share a room with a Leader, Leaders shall sleep in separate beds from Children/Youth so long as any one Leader shall not be alone with any one Child/Youth.
- Recognizing accommodations may be restrictive in some cases; one Leader is adequate, so long as any one Leader shall NOT be alone with any one Child or Youth.

The Northwest Texas Board of Conference Camping has a Safe Sanctuaries Policy in place for Ceta Canyon Methodist Camp and Retreat Center, Butman Methodist Camp and Retreat Center, and all Conference Camps. A copy of that policy can be obtained from either campsite or the Conference Office.

### **Definitions of Abuse**

*Verbal Abuse*- Any verbal act that humiliates degrades or threatens any Child or Youth.

*Physical Abuse* – Any act or omission that endangers a person’s physical or mental health. In the case of physical abuse of a Child or Youth, this definition includes any intentional physical injury caused by the individual’s parent, guardian or other caregiver. Physical abuse may result from punishment that is overly aggressive or inappropriate considering the individual’s age and/or physical or mental condition. In addition, physical abuse may result from purposeful acts that pose a serious danger to the physical health of a Child or Youth.

*Sexual Abuse* – Child or Youth sexual abuse is the sexual exploitation or use of a Child or Youth for the satisfaction of sexual drives. This includes, but is not limited to:

1. Incest;
2. Rape;
3. Prostitution;
4. Romantic involvement with any participant;
5. Any sexual intercourse, or sexual contact with an individual enrolled in Conference or District sponsored activities;
6. Behavior that communicates sexual interest and/or content;

Examples are not limited to:

Communicating sexual interest via an internet chat room, myspace/facebook type accounts, or e-mail; displaying sexually suggestive visual materials; making sexual comments or innuendo about one’s own or another person’s body; touching another person’s body, hair or clothing; touching or rubbing oneself in the presence of another person; kissing; and sexual intercourse. (#36 Book of Resolutions 2004).

### **Screening for Leaders, Assistant Leaders, and Childcare providers**

Careful screening of applicants is one way to prevent the abuse of anyone. Screening calls for a careful gathering and review of information in search of those who can provide safe and caring supervision in a safe environment.

Prior to employment or acceptance as a Leader, Assistant Leader or Childcare Provider (paid or unpaid), the event Leader in charge of a designated event or program shall direct each prospective applicant to complete the application/consent form. By signing the form, the applicant gives permission to the event Leader, local congregation and/or Conference Office to contact references and perform the necessary investigation to complete the review of the application.

The local congregation is responsible for investigating references and screening applicants. This may be done through the local church, District office, or the Conference Office. All screening shall be done in accordance with guidelines to be established by the Conference Safe Sanctuary Task Force.

The Conference Safe Sanctuary Task Force can be contacted for assistance at any time. Should reports raise questions about the fitness of an applicant; the Conference Office Staff Person will disapprove the application and notify the event Leader and/or local church. The Northwest Texas Conference reserves the right to turn away any persons for service.

If the applicant (paid or unpaid) is found to have been involved in any activity in which the applicant abused or exploited anyone, the applicant will not be approved. Any conviction for a crime against a minor Child or Youth shall disqualify an applicant.

Results of applicant screenings shall be kept confidential. The determination of whether a particular crime is serious enough to result in the Northwest Texas Conference giving a negative recommendation shall be made by the Northwest Texas Conference in its sole discretion. Without in any way limiting those crimes which the Northwest Texas Conference may determine to be serious, the Texas Conference offers the following examples as guidelines:

Persons having a criminal history of any of the following types of offenses shall not be allowed to serve in any ministry:

- Child abuse, whether physical, emotional, sexual, or neglectful
- Violent offenses, including murder, rape, assault, domestic violence, etc.
- Persons having a Criminal History of DUI or DWI conviction within the ten (10) years immediately prior to application shall not be allowed to act as a driver.

- Persons having a Criminal History of a drug related conviction within the five (5) years immediately prior to application shall not be allowed to participate in the event.

### **Training**

The Northwest Texas Conference of The United Methodist Church shall, through its Districts, develop and implement training and orientation procedures for all persons in leadership who work with all people regardless of age at Conference or District activities and events. Training shall include but is not limited to appropriate discipline, appropriate physical and emotional boundaries, leader misconduct, and this policy. No person shall, after May 31, 2007 have any direct or indirect contact with anyone regardless of age until they have completed this training program. We recommend that at the beginning of each event a review of this policy be conducted.

The Northwest Texas Conference Safe Sanctuary Task Force – will include: The Board of Conference Camping Chairperson, The Conference Children’s Resource Consultant, The Conference Youth Resource Consultant and the Conference Safe Sanctuary Staff Person, one District Superintendent and other members deemed necessary.

The guidelines of these policies and procedures create a status of Safe Sanctuary Certification with the Northwest Texas Conference. Leaders thus certified are entrusted with the title “Certified Safe Sanctuary Worker”

### **Reporting of Incidents**

1. When a Leader of a Conference or District program, event, or activity suspects that abuse is taking or has taken place, he or she must call 911 and report the abuse to the appropriate local law enforcement agency and/or the Department of Protective and Regulatory Services (800-252-5400). The Leader shall contact the administrator or event Leader immediately, and cooperate fully with the investigation conducted by law enforcement officials or child protective services.
2. Address any needs the person may have, medical or otherwise. Report to the parent(s) and/or legal guardians(s).
3. The person suspected of abuse (respondent) shall, for the safety and well being of the alleged victim, be removed with dignity from further contact with the alleged victim until an appropriate investigation has taken place. The matter shall remain confidential. If the event Leader is the respondent, then the report should be made to that person’s Conference supervisor.
4. Following the report of an incident, the event leader, or supervisor in charge shall document the report in cooperation with the appropriate authorities and their procedures.
5. All such conversations shall be documented. Careful and confidential documentation by the Conference is also essential. The documentation should include the following:
  - A. The name of the Leader observing or receiving the disclosure of abuse, including the date, time and place and any action taken by this person.
  - B. The alleged victim’s name, age, and date of birth.
  - C. Any statement made by the alleged victim.
  - D. Name of the person suspected of abuse (respondent), the date, time and place of any conversation or any statement made by the person suspected of abuse (respondent).
  - E. Any action taken, i.e. suspension of the respondent.
  - F. The date and time of any call to the appropriate agency, name of worker spoken to, content of that conversation and case number assigned.
  - G. The date and time of any call to a law enforcement agency, the name of officer spoken to and content of that conversation.
  - H. Date and time of any other contacts made regarding this incident.
6. The Conference/District authorities shall be notified immediately.

It shall be the goal to provide supportive care to both the alleged victim and the respondent and to restore such persons to wholeness. Supportive care can include the procedures of the criminal justice system, provisions of the current Book of Discipline, appropriate counseling referrals and continued pastoral visitation.

Confirmed reports of proven incidents of abuse shall be retained in a confidential Northwest Texas Conference Safe Sanctuary Task Force file for future screening purposes.