

# Safe Sanctuaries

## Reducing the Risk of Child Abuse in the Church

The Safe Sanctuaries Policy for Asbury United Methodist Church of Smyrna, Delaware  
2023



# Why have a Safe Sanctuaries Policy?

In 1996 the General Conference of the United Methodist Church mandated that each church would enact a Safe Sanctuaries Policy.

Asbury United Methodist Church has mandated that there be a Safe Sanctuaries Policy.

There is a Biblical mandate. “Anyone who welcomes a little child like this on my behalf is welcoming me. But if anyone causes one of these little ones who trust in me to lose faith, it would be better for that person to be thrown into the sea.” Matthew 18: 5-6

The Social Principles of the United Methodist Church states, “children must be protected from economic, physical, and sexual exploitation and abuse”.

# Who needs to be trained in the Safe Sanctuaries Policy?

Anyone who is now or who will be working with children, youth, or fragile adults.



# Abuse can occur where . . .

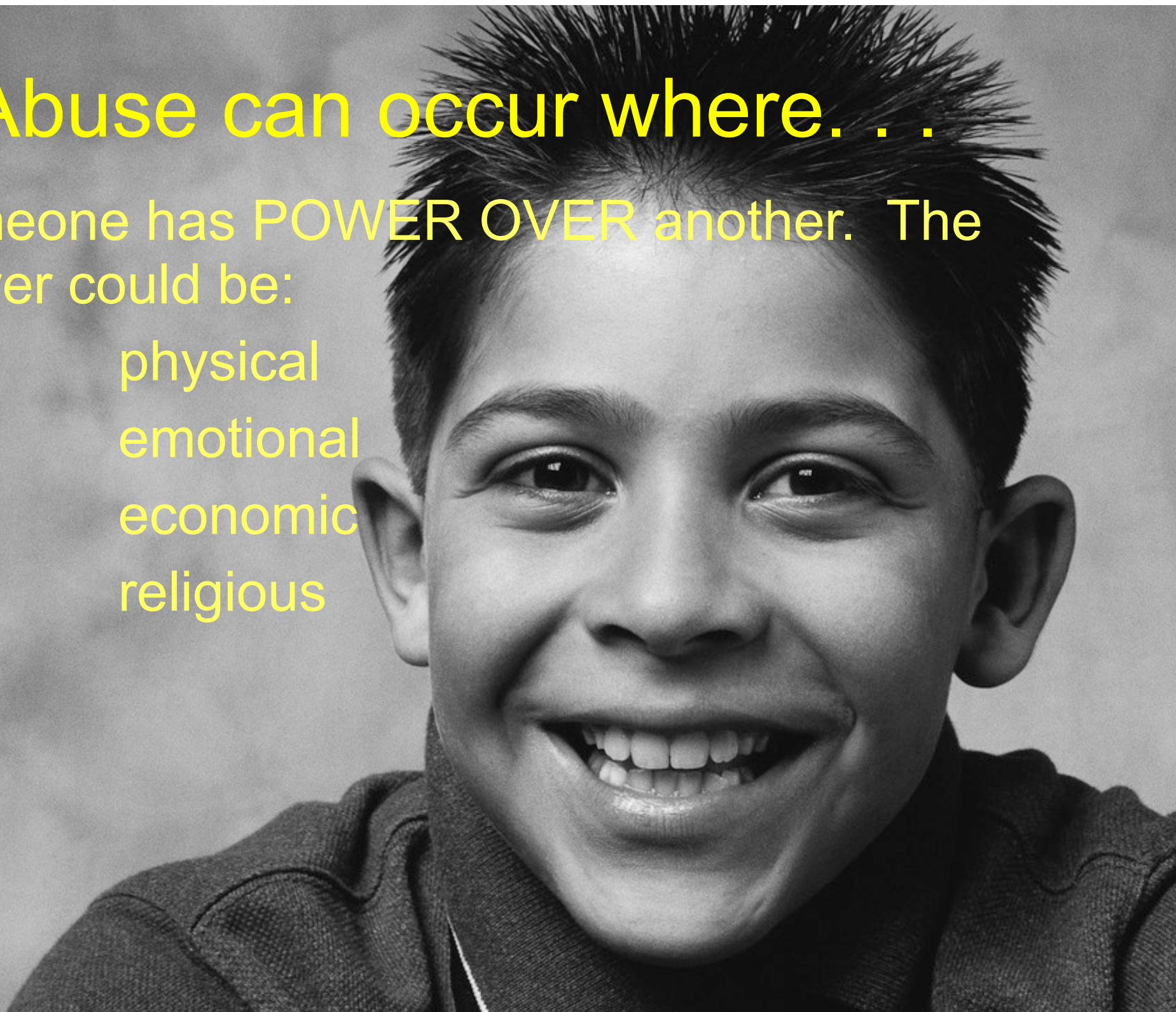
someone has **POWER OVER** another. The power could be:

physical

emotional

economic

religious



Less than 10% of abuse cases are by strangers.

More than 90% of abuse cases are by known persons.

A child is most likely going to be abused by someone they know

- A teacher
- A family friend
- Sunday school teacher
- Coach
- Relative

# Types of Abuse and the Indicators



# Types of Abuse



- Physical Abuse
- Emotional Abuse
- Neglect
- Sexual Abuse
- Ritual Abuse

# Physical Abuse

- Person deliberately and intentionally causes bodily harm.





# Indicators of Physical Abuse

- **Hostility and aggression towards others.**
- **Fearfulness of parents and/or other adults or older children**
- **Destructive behavior toward self, others and / or property.**
- **Burns, facial injuries and/or repeated bruises**
- **Unexplainable fractures or bruises**

# Emotional Abuse

- Person exposes a child to spoken and/or unspoken violence or emotional cruelty.



# Indicators of Emotional Abuse

- Depression and/or withdrawal
- Lack of self esteem
- Threats or attempts at suicide
- Speech and/or eating disorders
- Extreme passive or aggressive behavior
- Excessively seeks adult approval

# Neglect

- Person endangers a child's health, safety or welfare through negligence.



# Indicators of Neglect

- Failure to thrive
- Depression
- Inappropriate dress for climate
- Untreated medical conditions
- Chronic hunger
- Poor hygiene

# Sexual Abuse

- Sexual contact between an adult or an older, more powerful, youth and a child.

# Indicators of Sexual Abuse

- Advanced sexual knowledge and/or behavior
- Depression
- Promiscuous behavior
- Difficulty sitting or walking
- Bruising/bleeding in vaginal or anal area
- Frequent headaches, extreme fatigue
- Sexually transmitted diseases

# Ritual Abuse

- Abusive acts committed as part of ceremonies or rites are considered to be ritual abuse. Ritual abusers are often related to cults or pretend to be.





# Indicators of Ritual Abuse

- Disruptions of memory
- Fear of Dark
- Unexplained mistrust and mood swings
- Nightmares or sleep disorders
- Flashbacks
- Any of the sexual abuse symptoms

## **Signs Abuse Occurred at Church**

- **Unusual anxiety about going to Sunday school**
- **Reluctance to participate in activities that were previously enjoyed**
- **Comments that one does not want to be alone with a given person**
- **Nightmares of a frightening experience**
- **Unexplained hostility toward a church worker**

**How do we distinguish between the child who is truly frightened and the child who does not want to stay in the nursery?**

- **Is this a new/sudden pattern of behavior?**
- **Is the child expressing fear? How can you tell? Trust your child and talk it out with him or her. If you are observing this, encourage the parent to take the child's concerns seriously and talk it over with the child.**
- **Gentle questioning or open ended statements by the parents may encourage the tale to be told.**

# Basic Procedures for a Safe Ministry with Children, Youth, and Fragile Adults



# Recruiting, Screening, Hiring

- Must at least 18 years old.
- Six month rule for volunteers.
- Written applications for volunteer and paid staff.
- Personal references.
- Interviews.
- Participation covenant
- Driver's license checks
- Criminal background checks.

# Recruiting

- Volunteer and paid staff must be at least 18 years old and be at least five years older than the group with which they will be working.

- Youth that are under the age of 18 are not precluded from working with children. They also need to be trained, complete an application, and have a satisfactory background check. Youth under the age of 18 will not be placed in charge of a group of children or youth. Two supervisory adults are still needed.

# Screening

- Written applications will be completed for volunteers and paid staff.
- Personal reference calls will be made and an interview will take place.
- Driver's license check will be made.
- Criminal Background Checks will be completed.





# Criminal Background Check

A criminal background check (local, state, national) will be made through an approved company by Asbury United Methodist Church. Asbury United Methodist Church will cover the cost of the criminal background checks. Criminal background checks done for other groups or employment will not be considered and will not be used for Asbury UMC. Asbury reserves the right to use the results of the Criminal Background Check in the application process. Criminal background checks will be reviewed in accordance with our standard practice and adjudication policy. Criminal background checks will be redone on a three year rotating basis.

# Participation Covenant

Volunteers will sign a Participation Covenant. The Participation Covenant will include the following responsibilities:

- Observe and abide by church policies.

- Participate in training and education.

- Promptly report abusive and inappropriate behavior.

- Inform minister if ever convicted of child abuse.

# Procedures and Practices

- Safe Sanctuaries Training
- Appropriate Interpersonal Boundaries
- Two adult rule
- 18 Years Old and Older Volunteers
- Six Month Rule
- Five years older
- Interns
- Annual Review
- Classroom windows
- Appropriate Equipment and Supervision
- Open-door counseling
- Limited Counseling Sessions
- Advance notice to parents
- Parent and Family Education
- CPR/First Aid Training
- Building Use by Outside Groups
- Contractors
- Bathroom Assistance for Young Children
- Sign-in Sheets
- Dismissal of Students
- Overnight Activities/Trips

# Safe Sanctuaries Training

Annual training and review will be conducted by the Safe Sanctuaries Team for every volunteer and paid staff interacting with children, youth, and fragile adults.



# Appropriate Interpersonal Boundaries

Appropriate interpersonal boundaries are to be maintained between adults and children and youth so they may experience relationships that are healthy, physically and spiritually. Adults must model respectful and nurturing behaviors that do not interfere with another person's privacy.

Examples of appropriate interpersonal boundaries include, but are not limited to, dress, language, and demonstrations of affection.

# Two Adult Rule

No fewer than two adults will be present at any and all church-sponsored programs, events, or ministries involving children and/or youth. The two adults are to be unrelated by family or marriage. In the event that two adults are not present for activities such as Sunday School, Bible Club, or similar programs, the classroom door will remain open and a supervisory adult will make periodic observations of the classroom during the activity.

## **Volunteers Must Be 18 Years Old or Older.**

Volunteers are to be at least 18 years old. For activities involving children and youth, such as Bible Club and Vacation Bible School, persons who are less than 18 years old may volunteer only when accompanied by supervisory adults. Volunteers under the age of 18 years must be supervised by a Safe Sanctuaries trained adult. Volunteers under 18 are not to be considered as supervisors.

# Six Month Rule

People wishing to work with children, youth, or fragile adults must be a member of Asbury United Methodist Church and/or actively involved in the life of Asbury United Methodist Church for at least six months prior to becoming a volunteer. With the approval of the Safe Sanctuaries Team and the Executive Leadership Team, a person, who has been actively attending Asbury for less than six months, but has been involved in their previous church, can be considered as a volunteer.



# Five Years Older Rule

Volunteers and paid staff leading children or youth of Asbury will be a minimum of five years older than the group he/she is leading.

For Vacation Bible School, Bible Club, or other activities involving children and youth, which are conducted at Asbury, persons who are less than five years older than the group they are leading may do so only with supervisory adults.

# Interns

A covenant will be drawn up to guide an intern between the ages of 19 and 23. The duties of the intern will be specified and the role of the supervising staff member will be specified in the covenant. The covenant will be developed by the supervising staff member and the intern. The covenant will be approved by the Executive Leadership Team and signed by the pastor. Interns need to be Safe Sanctuaries trained, complete an application, and have a satisfactory background check.

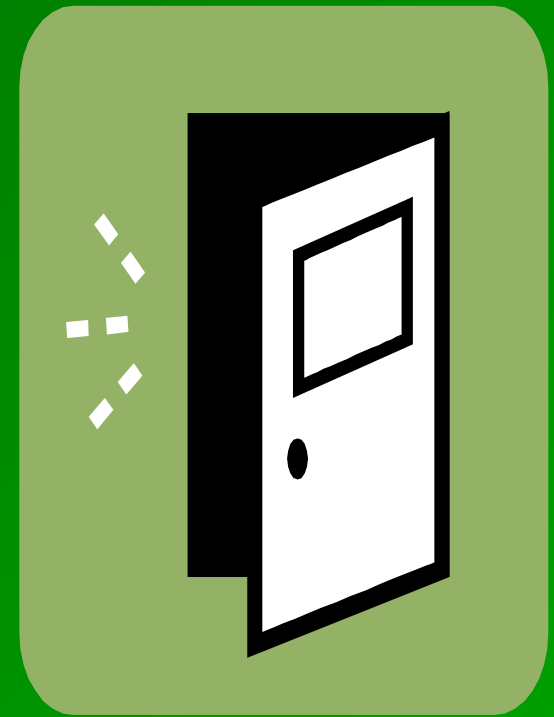
# Annual Review

All persons, paid or volunteer, who work with children, youth, or fragile adults at Asbury United Methodist Church will take part in an annual review. The review will include, but will not be limited to the following topics:

- Asbury's policy for the prevention of child abuse;
- Procedures to be used in all ministries with children, youth, and fragile adults;
- Appropriate steps to report an incident of child abuse;
- Details of the state law regarding child abuse.

# Windows in Classroom Doors

All windows in classroom doors will be uncovered for easy observation of classroom activities.



# Appropriate Equipment and Supervision

Ministries with children, youth, or fragile adults are carried out in an endless variety of settings and locations: church sanctuaries, classrooms, camps, athletic fields, parks, vans and buses (transportation), and homes. In planning for an activity for children, youth, or fragile adults, arrange for the event to take place in a setting that is appropriate for the activity. Ministries with children, youth, or fragile adults sometimes involve using special equipment.

Special knowledge to use the equipment and adequate supervision are required. Appropriate supervision of the ministries involving children, youth, and fragile adults will be carried out by following the policies regarding number of volunteers, age of volunteers, etc.

# Open-Door Counseling

Counseling sessions with children, youth, or fragile adults will be done with two adults present. If it is not possible to have two adults present, or if the child, youth, or fragile adult is not comfortable having two adults present, counseling will take place with the door to the room/office open. Counseling will take place at a time when observations can take place, minimizing both the risk of abuse for the child, youth, or fragile adult and risk of accusation for the counselor.

# Limited Counseling Sessions

Whenever a child, youth, or fragile adult seeks counseling, it is important to determine in the initial meeting if the counselor is actually qualified to address the child's, youth's, or fragile adult's needs effectively. If the counselor does not believe they are sufficiently qualified, refer the child, youth, or fragile adult to another counselor. In the event the counselor agrees to counsel the child, youth, or fragile adult, it is prudent to agree to a limited number of sessions and then refer the child, youth, or fragile adult to another counselor if the problems have not been resolved. Limited Counseling Sessions requires that a referral be made to a counselor with expertise in need of the child, youth, or fragile adult beyond two or three sessions.

# Advance Notice to Parents

In addition to an annual general permission slip that contains emergency information, specific permission slips will be required for participants of activities. Should a participant forget to bring the specific permission slip to the event, an effort will be made to obtain the signature of the parent, electronically. As another option, two adults may witness the parent/guardian's verbal permission to attend the event. Parents are to be notified of any event in which a worker will be alone with the child or youth, for example if the child or youth is waiting to be picked up, or as the last leg of transportation.



# Parent and Family Education

Parents and Families will be made aware of Asbury's Safe Sanctuaries Policy. Parents are invited to participate in Safe Sanctuaries training sessions. Pamphlets are available for review of the Safe Sanctuaries policy and procedures.

# CPR/First Aid Training

All volunteers and staff who work with children or youth are encouraged to attend CPR/First Aid training sessions. CPR/First Aid training sessions will be offered annually. Copies of certification cards will be placed on file.

# Use of Building by Outside Groups

Building use forms will indicate that all groups are mandated to comply with the Safe Sanctuaries Policy of Asbury United Methodist. The building use form will require identification of responsible adults for groups using Asbury United Methodist Church. There will be no unsupervised children or youth in the building. Anyone under the age of 18 must be in a supervised program. Outside groups must ensure children are constantly under supervision.

# Contractors

Contractors doing business at Asbury United Methodist Church will sign that they are aware of the Safe Sanctuaries policies of the Church and will comply with them.

# Bathroom Assistance

Older children, grades 1 through 6, will use a buddy system or have an adult escort them to the bathroom. Adults will wait outside the bathroom door. Another option would be that an adult could observe children walking down the hall to the Sunday School restroom. Adults in the rooms attached to the bathrooms will observe the child returning to their rooms. Parents of younger children will be given the option to change their own child's diaper/pants or take their child to the bathroom. Parents can give approval for Asbury staff/volunteer to change a child's diaper. The diaper will be changed in the presence of a second adult.

# Sign-In Sheets

Parents will sign children in on the sign-in sheet from the nursery up to the fourth grade. Students from the fifth grade up will sign themselves in and, if leaving early, sign out from all Church sponsored activities. Late arrivals and early dismissals will state a reason on the sign-in sheet.

# Dismissal of Students

Children in classes up to the fourth grade will be released to parents from Church sponsored activities. Siblings and other designated persons can pick up children, if parents have notified the supervising adults.

# Overnight Activities/Trips

For overnight activities/trips that take place at the church facility or away from the church facility, a chaperone of each gender will be present when the group is made up of male and female participants. In a hotel-type setting, youth and adults will be assigned to separate rooms. If possible, make the room assignments so that an adult room is between two youth rooms. Adults will set up a schedule where the adults will check on the youth rooms on a random schedule during the night. An adult could also stay awake and monitor the hallway. Hotels where the rooms are open to the interior of the building are to be used when possible. In the event a dormitory-style setting, youth and adults should be assigned separate areas, if possible. Adequate and safe transportation will be supplied. Parents are to be notified of any event in which a worker will be alone with the child or youth, for example if the child or youth is waiting to be picked up, or as the last leg of transportation.



# Transportation Guidelines

- While 15 passenger vans may be utilized, they are not the preferred vehicle type. If 15 passenger vans are utilized, only the driver and a maximum of nine passengers may be carried. The cargo area shall be lightly loaded and shall not obstruct the driver's rearview visibility. Passengers and remaining cargo shall be distributed throughout the vehicle as evenly as practical.
- Seat belt use is required of the driver and all passengers at all times that the vehicle is in motion.

- All drivers shall be Safe Sanctuaries Policy Trained, have an approved criminal background check, and a satisfactory driving record review. \*
- Additional adults traveling in a vehicle carrying children, youth, or fragile adults shall also be Safe Sanctuaries Policy Trained.
- At least one person traveling in each vehicle shall be trained in CPR and First Aid.
- An appropriately stocked first aid kit shall be available in each vehicle.

- A manifest shall be carried in each vehicle and shall include, at least, the following information for each person in the vehicle:
  - A. Full name
  - B. Emergency contact information
  - C. Current medical information
  - D. Medical insurance information
  - E. Directions, maps, contact information for destination, and cell phone numbers for all adults traveling in each vehicle
- A log shall be kept which shall include a list of driver's and all passenger's names, date and time of departure, all stops made (including date, time, and duration of all stops).

- The log should also make a notation of activity during stop, arrival time at destination, and any other information deemed pertinent by the driver.
- Vehicles shall **NOT** travel in a caravan, or convoy, fashion. Instead, plan out route and stops in advance; keep in contact by cell phone between vehicles to coordinate vehicle locations and any needed changes to the scheduled itinerary. A passenger, not the driver, should make these cell phone calls, if practical. **SAFETY FIRST!**

- A copy of each driver's license and automobile insurance card shall be kept on file at the church.
- \*The church's insurance carrier suggests that we should not allow "youthful" persons to serve as drivers. The industry standard is 25 years of age. Whenever possible utilize drivers who are at least 25 years of age.

# Reporting Child Abuse

These procedures will be followed when any of the aforementioned cases of suspected abuse has been observed:

1. The person observing the suspected abuse or the person the victim has told will orally report the incident to their immediate supervisor. Volunteers for the youth ministries are to report to the Youth Director and volunteers for the children's ministries are to report to the Christian Education Chairperson. The Senior Pastor will then be notified, who will in turn notify the District Superintendent

If the suspected abuse has been observed by the Youth Director or Christian Education Chairperson, the Senior Pastor will be notified, who will in turn notify the District Superintendent

The person observing the suspected abuse, or the person the victim has told about the abuse, will orally report the incident to the correct authorities

Phone numbers for the correct authorities can be found on the reporting forms. The reporting forms are located in the mailroom adjacent to the church office. This oral report is to be made within 24 hours of the observation.

2. The reporter of the suspected abuse is to follow up the oral report with a written report within 48 hours. The written report is to be made on an incident reporting form. The reporting forms are located in the mailroom adjacent to the church office. A copy of the completed forms will be returned to the church office in a sealed envelope. The original form will be mailed to the appropriate authorities. The address can be found on the form.



3. In the event that the suspected abuser is one of the people mentioned above, for example, the Youth Director or Children Ministry Director or Senior Pastor, the reporter will notify the next higher level of supervision. If the suspected abuser is a paid staff member or volunteer, other than the Senior Pastor, the reporter is to directly notify the Senior Pastor, who will in turn notify the District Superintendent

If the suspected abuser is the Senior Pastor, the reporter will notify the Associate Pastor\*, who will notify the District Superintendent. Then together the reporter and the Associate Pastor will notify the Executive Leadership Team and the Safe Sanctuaries Team.

\*In the event no Associate Pastor is assigned at Asbury United Methodist Church, notification shall be made to the chair of the Executive Leadership Team and the Safe Sanctuaries Team.

While these procedures have been put in place at the Church level, the reporting of a suspected incident of abuse must conform to the requirements of state law. It is also important to remember throughout the entire procedure that serious attention should be paid to each and every report and that the identities of the reporter, victims, and suspected abusers should be guarded.

# Managing the Program

## The Safe Sanctuaries Team will:

Be responsible for the implementation of the Safe Sanctuaries Policy.

Maintain and follow up on applications and covenants.

Make personal reference calls.

Complete Background checks. All personal information will be secured in a locked location.

Review the Safe Sanctuaries Policy annually.

Thank you for your commitment to children,  
youth, and fragile adults and their safety!