

# **SAFE SANCTUARIES POLICY AND PROCEDURES**

## **RICHLAND HILLS UNITED METHODIST CHURCH**

**7301 GLENVIEW DRIVE**

**NORTH RICHLAND HILLS, TEXAS**

### **Guidelines for the Prevention of Abuse of Children, Youth, and Vulnerable Adults**

#### **Statement of Purpose:**

Members of Richland Hills United Methodist Church come from a variety of experiences, backgrounds and needs. Many of RHUMC's ministries involve married and single adults who have children in our children and youth areas. RHUMC is committed to providing a safe environment for children, youth, and vulnerable adults who attend the church or any church-sponsored programs or activities, and to taking the necessary precautions to protect church workers from false accusations or suspicions.

Members of RHUMC recognize the need to have a formal, written policy and procedures to help prevent the opportunity for abuse or the appearance of abuse of children, youth and vulnerable adults. The following policy and procedures are not based on a lack of trust in workers but instead are intended to protect our pre-schoolers, children, youth, vulnerable adults, workers, employees, volunteers and the entire church body. It is our intent that this policy will be fully implemented by January 2007.

*"Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these. And he took the children in his arms, put his hands on them and blessed them." Mark 10:14, 16*

*"Now it is required that those who have been given trust must prove faithful." I Corinthians 4:2*

Adopted by Church Council, April 2006

## **Definitions:**

**“Protected Persons” when used herein, shall mean all pre-school children, all children, all youth and all vulnerable adults participating in programs and activities of Richland Hills United Methodist Church.**

**“Workers” when used herein, shall mean all ministers, staff, employees, program directors, and volunteers involved in programs and activities of Richland Hills United Methodist Church which are a part of any of the “Protected Persons” ministries of the church.**

**“Child, children” when used herein, shall mean all persons from birth through twelve years of age.**

**“Youth” when used herein, shall mean students from twelve years of age through nineteen years of age or the summer following high school graduation. A person becomes an adult for purposes of this policy when the person attains age eighteen regardless of the grade level at the time of a person who is a student.**

**“Vulnerable Adult” when used herein, shall mean an adult who requires special care and supervision because of a mental or physical condition or disability.**

## **1.0 GUIDING PRINCIPLES**

.01 By fostering awareness of appropriate, as well as inappropriate, behavior in the presence of Protected Persons, RHUMC, as part of the body of Christ, will demonstrate Christian love and respect for one another.

.02 RHUMC recognizes that certain Workers have exceptional talents for teaching and supporting the growth and development of RHUMC’s Protected Persons, and wishes to encourage them to use their spiritual gifts. At the same time however, RHUMC has set certain criteria for those Workers who choose to serve in this ministry in order to protect the well being of the Protected Persons involved in programs and activities at RHUMC.

.03 It is not the intent of RHUMC to be judgmental, for we are all accountable to God. We will rely on God's wisdom in developing, implementing and carrying out God’s will through this policy. Compassion and truth will be the guiding forces for any

investigation, reporting or follow-up action that results from the procedures as outlined in this policy.

.04 Congregational support is critical for adherence to this policy. The limited nature of our resources, and our desire to devote as much time and effort as possible to the work of the Lord, mandates that this policy be fully understood by every member of our congregation and church family. This will enable church staff and leadership to do what is necessary to preserve the church's resources for the work of the Lord.

## **2.0 PROHIBITED BEHAVIOR**

.01 The following behaviors are prohibited for all Workers:

- Threatening or intentionally inflicting emotional or physical injury upon a Protected Person.
- Committing any sexual offense against a Protected Person, or engaging in any sexual contact with a Protected Person.
- Making any kind of sexual advance, or making a request for sexual favors, or engaging in other verbal, visual or physical conduct of a sexual nature with a Protected Person.

## **3.0 WORKER ENLISTMENTS AND SCREENING**

.01 All Workers shall complete either the appropriate Employment Application or Volunteer Application and a Form for Authorization for Release of Information for criminal records check. This requirement applies to all Workers who are involved in any ministry of RHUMC which serves Protected Persons, including, but not limited to, the following programs and activities: Sunday School, nurseries, choir, Vacation Bible School, mission trips, retreats, recreational trips, and service projects. All Workers shall meet all the requirements and approvals for service set out herein.

.02 Within this policy, the term "Director" shall mean the person in charge of a particular ministry. The Director shall be responsible for coordinating applications and achieving compliance with this policy by all Workers within such Director's particular ministry. For the following areas of ministry the Director is identified as:

|                                       |                      |
|---------------------------------------|----------------------|
| Nursery/ Elementary / Children's Team | Minister of Children |
| Youth / Youth Team                    | Minister of Youth    |
| Children's and Youth Choirs           | Director of Music    |
| All other Staff or Work Areas         | Pastoral Staff       |

Reference Check form will be used to document discussions and findings.

.03 All Workers shall provide personal references on the Employment or Volunteer application. At least two of these references may be checked at any time, unless the volunteer or paid Worker has previously completed the application process in the previous three years. The Volunteer Reference Check form will be used to document discussions and findings.

.04 The requirements set forth herein shall be completed prior to any applicant being allowed to serve in the ministries with Protected Persons. A Director shall not assume that an applicant's prior behavior is proper without first verifying the information as provided in the application.

.05 A Criminal Records Check must be made on all Workers. The Business Manager will make random re-checks of Workers.

.06 The term 'criminal history' refers to any items reported on a person's criminal records, including arrests, charges, convictions, and deferred adjudications. Persons having a conviction of any of the following types of offenses shall not be allowed to serve in any ministries involving Protected Persons:

- Child abuse, whether physical, emotional, sexual, or neglectful;
- Violent offenses, including murder, rape, assault, family violence, etc.;
- DUI's, or DWI's where the person in question may be serving as a driver;
- Any criminal offense may preclude a member from working in a Protected Person's ministry area. This will be determined on a case-by-case basis by the Staff-Parish Relations Committee. In all such cases, the ultimate goal will be the best interests, safety and well-being of the Protected Persons.

.07 All Workers approved under this policy are responsible for monitoring the actions of other Workers and ensuring that this policy is followed. Anyone who refuses to comply with this policy or repeatedly fails to follow it should be reported to the Director, the Senior Pastor, or the District Superintendent.

## **4.0 POLICY FOR WORKERS IN CHILDREN'S PROGRAMS, SIXTH GRADE AND BELOW.**

### **4.1 Worker Conduct**

.01 Two Workers must whenever possible be present in any room where children are present and participating in a church program or activity. Workers must avoid being alone with a child behind a closed door.

.02 Whenever possible the door to classrooms should be kept open, or, in the case of rooms with Dutch doors, the top half of the door should be kept open. It is acceptable to close the door to the classroom if there is a window to the hallway that allows observation of activities in the room.

.03 Classes shall remain in the assigned classroom location. If Sunday school classes need to combine or move, a sign must be posted on the door providing notice of any change of class location.

.04 The Workers in each children's Sunday school classroom or other children's ministry group shall maintain a Student Information File. This file shall contain a listing of the students enrolled in the class or ministry group with references or remarks as to any Parent Instructions or special information regarding a child in such class or ministry group.

.05 Workers shall not allow children to leave the classroom, program or activity unattended.

.06 Classroom doors must never be locked while occupied by Workers and children.

.07 Workers shall wear their assigned nametags while on duty. The nametags will signify by a style or symbol that the Worker is approved under this policy.

.08 With children 4 years and younger, a positive identity security system will be used so that the person picking up the child can be positively matched to the child. For children older than four years of age, the parent or legal guardian shall complete a form that identifies who may pick up the child and where the parent(s)/ guardian(s) are likely to be found while the child is in the class. Only a parent/ guardian or other person specifically designated by the parent/guardian and known or positively identified to the Worker may pick up children. Parents/ guardians shall provide the Director with any special information regarding a possible child custody dispute where Workers should pay particular attention to who picks up the child. All children must be picked up at the end of the children's activity and before going to any other activity.

.09 Children who are brought to an activity as a guest need to be picked up by the adult with whom they came unless other written instructions have been given.

.10 Workers will be trained regarding appropriate contact with children. Workers shall not touch children in genital areas except as necessary to change a diaper or to assist a child in the bathroom as noted below.

.11 Diaper changing should be done in the open and not behind closed doors.

.12 For children four years and under in classrooms which have attached bathrooms, a Worker may assist a child in the bathroom, while keeping the door open at all times. For children over four years of age, when a child is taken to a bathroom outside the classroom, a Worker must check the bathroom before the child enters to ensure it is safe. The Worker shall not accompany the child into the bathroom. The Worker may release a child to a designated Worker serving as a hall monitor in order to stay in the classroom with the children.

## **4.2 Discipline of Children**

.01 Physical discipline by a Worker, such as spanking, shall never be permitted and should be reported to the Director if observed. Affirmation and encouragement are always appropriate.

.02 The Director may advise Workers on developmentally appropriate discipline methods.

.03 The behavior of a child who is a constant disruption to a class, activity or program should be discussed with his or her parents and the Director. In appropriate circumstances, the parents can be asked to attend the class, activity or program to observe or control the problem behavior. If the behavior persists, the child may be removed from the class. A child who is a danger to him/herself or other children shall be removed immediately by the Worker and the parents/ legal guardians shall be promptly notified.

## **4.3 Continuing Training for Workers**

.01 The Directors shall encourage and may require Workers to attend continuing education opportunities.

.02 The Directors shall communicate the substance of this policy to all Workers, and all Workers must agree to comply with this policy.

.03 Mandatory training of Workers shall be provided on a regular basis for fire and building safety, the statutory requirements for the mandatory reporting of child abuse, the identification of abuse and other operational guidelines.

## **4.4 Communication with Parents**

- .01 Workers should attempt to keep open lines of communication with parents.
- .02 Parents shall always be permitted to observe in a classroom although the Worker may tell the parent that his or her presence may be disruptive to the children.
- .03 Parents shall be clearly advised by the Director where to report suspected abuse or other concerns regarding a classroom situation and be assured that reports would remain confidential.
- .04 Parents shall be advised by the Director that they must pick up their children no later than five (5) minutes after the class; activity or program is over unless special arrangements have been made with the Workers concerned. Children will be taken to a central waiting location (Reeves Hall)
- .05 Information concerning the sleeping accommodations for children at any overnight event shall be made available to parents by the Director.
- .06 A written and signed parental consent form shall be obtained for each child who participates in any off-campus activity or program as a part of a RHUMC ministry. The consent form shall cover specific events. A parent or legal guardian must sign the consent form for each event. The consent form shall identify the organization/class or group involved, the place of the activity, a description of the activity, the method of transportation and the name of the Worker supervising the event, program or activity. A current medical consent form signed by a parent or guardian shall also be obtained for each child and shall be kept with by the Worker supervising the event.

## **4.5 Staffing of the Children's Program**

- .01 There shall be a minimum of two (2) Workers assigned to each class and a minimum of one (1) assigned to each "break-out group" which is part of a larger class.
- .02 There shall always be a Director or their designee on duty while classes are in session that shall make random checks of all classrooms.
- .03 The Director shall make provision for last-minute replacements of a Worker who cannot be present on a given day. If the required number of Workers cannot be obtained, the class must be cancelled or combined with another class in order to achieve compliance with the required number of Workers in a classroom.
- .04 To ensure that there shall be sufficient substitutes available when the regular Worker cannot attend, the Children's Ministry Team, in conjunction with the Director, shall develop a program to encourage church members to undergo the mandatory screening process in order to serve as Workers.

## **5.0 POLICIES FOR WORKERS IN PROGRAMS FOR YOUTH AND VULNERABLE ADULTS**

### **5.1 Physical Contact**

.01 Back rubs, massages, kissing, or similar contact are not allowed, but Workers will be trained regarding appropriate contact with youth and vulnerable adults. Touching should not be avoided, but Workers must be aware of how it looks and how the person being touched may interpret the contact.

### **5.2 Staffing Considerations for Planned Activities**

.01 A minimum of two (2) adults who have completed the required screening and training shall be present for all activities. A ratio of eight (8) youth to one (1) worker is recommended. Actual ratio shall not exceed ten (10) youth to one (1) worker.

.02 Any one-on-one meeting involving a youth must be conducted with the door open or where other people are present.

.03 Should any Worker become aware of an attraction towards a Worker on the part of a youth or vulnerable adult, the Worker must immediately report the attraction to the director. In the case of an attraction toward the director it must be reported to the Senior Pastor.

### **5.3 Meetings Between Director and Youth**

.01 It shall not be a violation of the two-adult policy for the Director to conference with a youth, when the youth has requested the closed meeting, providing (1) the Director informs a staff member at the beginning of the meeting, (2) the Director informs a staff member at the end of the meeting, (3) a staff member keeps a record of the meeting, its date and time, and the identity of the youth involved, (4) such meetings are infrequent, and (5) any such meetings should take place in a room with a window in the door or an open door.

### **5.4. Driving Rules**

.01 All drivers must have a valid driver's license and proof of insurance. Youth are not to drive other youth without consent of parents involved. The number of persons per vehicle must not exceed the number of seatbelts, and all occupants must wear seatbelts.

.02 Workers who drive on a church owned or leased vehicle on must be additionally screened by completing an Application For Inclusion On the Approved Drivers List. The information on this form will be used to screen the potential driver through the church's insurance company and the State's Department of Motor Vehicles.

## **5.5 Consent Forms**

.01 A medical information and consent form must be completed annually by all parents or legal guardians of youth and kept on file by workers. Visitors will be asked to provide parental contact information. Visitors will not be taken on overnight trips without completion of medical information and consent of parent or legal guardian. Electronic copies of documents should be created and kept indefinitely.

## **6.0 REPORTING AND INVESTIGATIONS**

### **6.1 Reporting Requirements**

.01 All Workers shall immediately report and document any incident of abuse or violation of this policy. Any person making and/or receiving such a report shall keep the information strictly confidential.

### **6.2 Reportable Incident Defined**

.01 A "reportable incident" means any occurrence in which:

- Any person has intentionally threatened or inflicted emotional or physical injury upon a Protected Person, or is reasonably suspected by a worker to have done so.
- Any person commits or knowingly allows any sexual offense to be committed against a Protected Person, or engages in any sexual contact with a Protected Person, or is reasonably suspected by a worker to have done so.
- A Protected Person makes any kind of unwanted sexual advance, or makes a request for sexual favors, or engages in sexually motivated physical contact, or engages in other verbal, visual or physical conduct of a sexual nature, or is reasonably suspected by a worker to have done so.

### **6.3 Reporting Procedure**

.01 The person reporting an incident shall contact the Director, as previously defined in Section 3.0(.02) or a minister of the church.

.02 All situations shall be handled confidentially with due respect for the privacy of the alleged victim and all others involved in the incident. Before, during and after the making of a report of an incident, the incident and report should be disclosed only to, and discussed only with, those defined by this policy as having a need to know.

.03 The person making a report of an incident shall inform the Director or minister of all facts known with respect to the incident. Upon receiving a report of an incident, the Director or minister, together with the person making the report shall complete the written Suspicion of Incident Report. However, in all cases where the alleged abuser is the person to whom a report should be made, he or she shall be considered absent for purposes of this reporting procedure, and the report shall be made to that Director's immediate supervisor, a minister, or the District Superintendent.

.04 In all cases where any Worker has reasonable cause to believe that a Protected Person participating in or involved in RHUMC ministries may be abused or neglected, the Worker is required by state law to make a report to the State of Texas Child Protective Services. Prior to making such report, the Worker should follow the internal reporting procedure outlined above. If the Worker is in doubt regarding whether a report should be made, he or she should consult with the ministry Director or a minister of RHUMC. The person reporting the incident of abuse and the Director or minister shall then, together, contact CPS.

.05 If a minister or other worker receives information pertaining to a potential violation of this policy as part of a communication which is, or may be, privileged from disclosure to others by law, a minister or other worker shall promptly consult legal counsel prior to making any report.

### **6.4 Imminent Threat**

.01 In all cases where an imminent threat of continued or additional abuse exists, any person with knowledge or information about such abuse shall immediately contact another adult and take steps to ensure the safety of the Protected Person. In the event of a breach of peace, the Worker shall contact 911. After the safety of the Protected Person has been secured, the person with knowledge or information about the incident of abuse shall complete a written Suspicion of Incident Report. In instances where the abuse of a Protected Person is alleged to have occurred at home, and the child's safety at home is in doubt, the person reporting the alleged abuse shall call 911 to notify the appropriate law enforcement officials.

## **6.5 Responding to the Report**

.01 When a Director or minister receives a report of an incident, he or she shall immediately take all steps necessary to ensure the safety of the alleged victim when necessary. After the safety of the alleged victim has been secured, and after the report has been appropriately documented (using the Suspicion of Incident Report), the person receiving the report shall:

- Immediately contact parents or guardian of the alleged victim and inform each of them of the alleged incident if it involves abuse, neglect or injury, or if otherwise necessary. If one parent or guardian is involved in the incident of abuse or neglect, the person receiving the report shall not contact either parent or guardian until after Child Protective Services has conducted their initial investigation.
- In the event of reported abuse or neglect, immediately contact the appropriate liability insurance carrier and RHUMC's legal counsel, who shall initiate, within 72 hours of the report, an investigation (with the assistance of the appropriate ministerial staff) and determine whether there is reasonable cause to believe that the abuse may have occurred.
- In the event of reported abuse or neglect, take all reasonable steps necessary to ensure that the alleged wrongdoer has no contact with the alleged victim pending the investigation.
- In the event of reported abuse or neglect, take all steps necessary to ensure that the alleged wrongdoer is barred from further work with Protected Persons pending the investigation.

## **6.6 Investigation**

.01 Upon notification of a reported incident of abuse or neglect within the ministries of RHUMC, the attorney shall conduct an investigation with the supervision of a "Supervising Committee," which shall consist of two ministers of the church not involved in the allegations.

.02 The Supervising Committee shall ensure:

- That the investigation is kept strictly confidential and that all evidentiary privileges are maintained.
- That the investigation is thoroughly documented and that a confidential file is maintained.
- That all known witnesses with information concerning the alleged abuse are contacted and interviewed.

- That the interests of the alleged victim and alleged wrongdoer are protected during the investigative phase.
- That the attorney, within 72 hours of the receipt of the report or as soon thereafter as is practical, and in consultation with the Supervising Committee, reaches a conclusion whether there is reasonable cause to believe abuse or neglect may have occurred.

## **6.7 Finding of No Abuse**

.01 If the attorney finds that there is not reasonable cause to believe the alleged abuse or neglect may have occurred, the attorney shall provide a written report to the Church Council of RHUMC.

.02 The written report shall:

- Preserve the identity, confidentiality and privacy of the alleged victim, the alleged wrongdoer, and all witnesses identified and contacted.
- Summarize the allegations and the steps taken to investigate them.
- Set forth the conclusion and the reasons supporting the conclusion.
- Set forth the temporary actions taken by the Supervising Committee and also set forth a recommendation of additional action to be taken by the Church Council in response to the reported incident of abuse or neglect.

## **6.8 Finding of Abuse**

.01 If the attorney finds that there is reasonable cause to believe abuse or neglect may have occurred, the attorney shall provide a written report and meet with the Church Council.

.02 The written report shall:

- Preserve the identity, confidentiality and privacy of the alleged victim, the alleged wrongdoer, and all witnesses identified and contacted. '
- Set forth the allegations and the steps taken to investigate the allegations.
- Set forth the facts discovered during the investigation.
- Set forth the conclusion reached as a result of the investigation and the reasons supporting the conclusion; and

- Set forth the temporary actions taken by the Supervising Committee and additional actions, if any, to be taken by the Church Council.

.03 In addition, the Senior Pastor shall ensure that the following actions are taken:

- Send notice of a claim or potential claim to RHUMC general liability insurance carrier, and of appropriate, the sexual misconduct liability insurance carrier, as soon as possible, but in no event later than thirty (30) days after receiving the report of the incident or such shorter period of time as set forth in any applicable policy of insurance. In addition, provide the carrier with all other information and cooperate with such carrier as may be required.
- Cause the crisis response plan to be implemented.
- Report the incident to the District Superintendent and the Bishop.
- Conduct all further investigations as directed by the Church Council.

.04 In addition, the Supervisory Committee shall consider the need for counseling for the alleged victim, the alleged abuser, and others who may be aware of the incident. Where appropriate the church shall offer such counseling directly or arrange for it through other sources.

## **6.9 Violations of the Two-Adult or Open-Door Policy Not Involving Abuse or Neglect**

.01 Upon receiving information indicating a violation of the two-adult or open-door policy not involving abuse or neglect(Sections 4.1 and 5.2), the person receiving such information shall document the alleged violation by completing the incident report, discuss the violation with the person alleged to have violated the policy, and submit the report to the appropriate Director.

.02 If any person refuses to comply with this policy or continues to violate this policy the Director or minister supervising this person, such person shall be barred from further work with Protected Persons.