

# SAFE SANCTUARIES: Abuse Risk Reduction and Prevention Policy

Spirit of Grace, ELCA UMC  
a Methodist-Lutheran cooperative church  
Hood River, Oregon  
June 2016

## INTRODUCTION

Spirit of Grace (formerly Asbury Our Redeemer Partnership) is committed to providing for the safety of children, youth, and vulnerable adults. As God cares for all, we care for all. This Safe Sanctuaries: Abuse Risk Reduction and Prevention Policy is part of the core missional statement of this congregation. It reminds us of our commitment to live lives in service as we accompany our neighbors, love each other and our community, and learn through valuing and encouraging spiritual growth.

## PURPOSE & SCOPE

Our hope and belief today is that the church is a place where all people will find the unconditional love and care they so desperately need to grow and thrive. But, we know that abuse occurs in churches, large and small, urban and rural. It is a reality which cuts across all economic, cultural, and racial lines. In April 1996, the General Conference of The United Methodist Church adopted a resolution aimed at reducing the risk of abuse of children, youth, and vulnerable adults in the church. It was renewed by the 2004 General Conference (Resolution 65, "Reducing the Risk of Child Sexual Abuse in Churches, pg. 201, 2004 Book of Resolutions).

As Christians we must take our responsibilities to our children, youth, and vulnerable adults very seriously. While policies alone may not be able to completely prevent all harm, sexual abuse can be prevented. We as the people of Spirit of Grace are dedicated to preventing child abuse within our ministry and within our community.

## DEFINITIONS

Abuse: intentional, negligent, or reckless behavior by a volunteer or staff person that is harmful, injurious, or offensive. Abuse takes many forms and includes, but is not limited to: physical abuse, neglect, self-neglect, abandonment, verbal and emotional abuse, financial exploitation, sexual abuse, involuntary seclusion, and wrongful restraint.<sup>1</sup>

Child Abuse: an act committed by a stranger, a parent, a caregiver, or a person in a position of trust, which is not accidental and which harms or threatens a child's physical or mental health or a child's welfare.<sup>2</sup>

Physical Abuse: when an adult injures a child other than by accident; including, but not limited to: assault, battery, shaking, slapping, burning, scalding, kicking and strangling.

Sexual Abuse:<sup>3</sup>

1. any sexual contact or sexually explicit behavior initiated by an adult, youth or child toward a child;
2. any sexual contact or sexually explicit sexual behavior initiated by an adult toward a youth;
3. any nonconsensual sexual contact or nonconsensual sexually explicit behavior initiated by a youth toward another youth including, but not limited to sexual harassment and any sexual behavior by a youth toward another youth younger than 14 and where the initiating youth is three years older;
4. any sexual contact by anyone toward a vulnerable adult, or sexually explicit behavior by anyone toward a vulnerable adult where the vulnerable adult is unable to provide meaningful consent.

Emotional Abuse: verbal assault or emotional cruelty.

Adult: a person 18 years old or older.

Activities: any activity or programs in which children, youth, or vulnerable adults are under supervision of staff persons or volunteers.

Background Checks: researching references and records for indications of past or potential abusive and/or criminal activity.

Child: person from birth until they turn 12 years old.

Conference: The Oregon-Idaho Annual Conference of The United Methodist Church.

Person-in-Charge: staff person or volunteer who is the person responsible for the event or activity.

Prevention and Risk Reduction: Risk Reduction are those actions taken to lessen opportunity for sexual assault. Most policies focus exclusively on risk reduction, and do very little to prevent sexual abuse in the broader community. Spirit of Grace is committed not only to lessening risk within congregational facilities and the activities, but Spirit of Grace is also committed to Prevention of abuse by transformational ministry to survivors, justice and equity ministry, and social change.<sup>4</sup> Spirit of Grace recognizes that understanding the difference between Prevention and Risk Reduction is an important step in developing effective Prevention strategy.<sup>5</sup>

**Sexual Contact:** means any touching of the sexual or other intimate parts of a person or causing such person to touch the sexual or other intimate parts of the actor for the purpose of arousing or gratifying the sexual desire of either party. Regarding children, youth, and vulnerable adults, Sexual Contact herein includes, but is not limited to kissing, hugging, massaging, rubbing, blowing on or breathing on, and other touching with any intent by anyone to sexually arouse any person. Spirit of Grace reserves the right to evaluate such behaviors and provide guidelines to prevent abuse and protect persons.

**Sexually Explicit Behavior:** means actual or simulated behavior and remains a common form of harassment and abuse. It includes but is not limited to: words, gestures, sexting and media representations of sexual activity, jokes, nudity or partial nudity, and other behaviors.

**Staff person:** any person employed by the local ministry setting that is responsible for activities involving children, youth, or vulnerable adults.

**Volunteer:** a person who assists in conducting activities under the supervision of person(s) in charge.

**Vulnerable Adults:** any persons over the age of 18 who possesses a physical or mental disability or dysfunction that impairs the individual's ability to provide adequately for the individual's own care without assistance, including but not limited to:

1. the inability to independently or effectively communicate, and/or
2. the inability to independently remove oneself from a situation, location or another's presence, and/or
3. the inability to comprehend initiation or perpetration of abusive sexual behavior or physical mistreatment upon the individual's person by another, and/or
4. because of the dysfunction or infirmity, the individual has an impaired ability to protect the individual's self from maltreatment.

**We:** Spirit of Grace.

**Youth:** any person 12 years old to his/her 18th birthday.

## PROHIBITION OF ABUSE AT SPIRIT OF GRACE

Spirit of Grace prohibits abuse as defined herein in all forms by anyone who is:

1. within the facilities of Spirit of Grace;
2. at any and all events sponsored by Spirit of Grace;
3. a staff member of Spirit of Grace
4. a member of Spirit of Grace
5. a contractor working on behalf of Spirit of Grace
6. a member of a group which leases or uses the name, facility, or the ministries of Spirit of Grace

Spirit of Grace supports all persons connected to the ministry and the surrounding community in seeking to engage in healthy relationships, including healthy parent-child and healthy

intimate partner relationships. Further, Spirit of Grace is committed to equipping all persons connected to the ministry and the surrounding community to be aware of, to prevent, and to resist abusive behavior in all forms through prayer, spiritual growth, words, and action.

## ABUSE AWARENESS AND PREVENTION AT SPIRIT OF GRACE

- 1) Spirit of Grace shall annually designate one Sunday on which abuse awareness and abuse prevention are incorporated into the worship experience. The District Superintendent's office and Synod Office shall be notified as to when this service has taken place.
- 2) Spirit of Grace shall annually offer an educational opportunity on abuse prevention.<sup>6</sup>
- 3) Spirit of Grace shall offer opportunities for survivors of sexual abuse to find healing and support in the context of Spirit of Grace's ministry.<sup>7</sup> Spirit of Grace will provide local listings of available, competent community resources for survivors when needed.

## RISK REDUCTION: SCREENING PROCEDURES

- 1) All adults, volunteer or staff persons of Spirit of Grace who have regular and direct contact with children, youth, and vulnerable adults and/or act to lead worship or represent the church in an ongoing, official capacity shall be required to complete an application including disclosure of information including legal name and other names previously used, date of birth, and voluntary disclosure of any convictions of abusive behavior.
- 2) All adults, volunteer or staff persons of Spirit of Grace who have regular and direct contact with children, youth, and vulnerable adults and/or act to lead worship or represent Spirit of Grace in an ongoing, official capacity<sup>8</sup> shall be required to:
  - a) Furnish two references (from persons unrelated to applicant) on an application form, and
  - b) Complete a State and/or National criminal background check.
- 3) The reviewing body responsible for overseeing the screening process is Asbury Our Redeemer Staff Parish Relations Committee.
  - a) Asbury Our Redeemer Staff Parish Relations Committee is responsible for review and approval of each application before a person's service begins.
  - b) The screening procedure for each individual shall be repeated every five years.
  - c) All records are confidential and will be maintained in a safe, secure place to ensure confidentiality. The records should be maintained for a period of 50 years. Spirit of Grace will not knowingly hire anyone with a history of committing sexual abuse on any child, youth, or vulnerable adult.
  - d) Spirit of Grace will communicate this abuse prevention policy to outside groups/organizations using the facilities and receive written receipt signed by the key contact with the outside group acknowledging the policy and accepting responsibility to comply with the screening, supervision, and reporting/response requirements of this policy.
  - e) Spirit of Grace will require outside groups using the facilities to sign a waiver and release stating Spirit of Grace accepts no civil or criminal liability resulting from any incident of child abuse or sexual misconduct/sexual abuse which takes place under the auspices of an outside organization/group using the local ministry setting facilities.

## RISK REDUCTION: TRAINING AND SUPERVISION

- 1) Spirit of Grace requires training for all persons having direct contact with children, youth, and vulnerable adults. Training shall include an annual orientation that includes information about the local ministry setting abuse prevention policy. Paid staff who are required to attend these trainings should be compensated for their time.<sup>9</sup>
- 2) Our standard practice of 2-deep leadership is that all children, youth, and vulnerable adults will be supervised by at least 2 adults and that no adult will be alone with children, youth, or vulnerable adult(s) out of sight of other adults.<sup>10</sup> The minimum standard is an open space (open door, window, etc) such that activities can be observed and an adult who is assigned to periodically observe the activities.
- 3) When car travel is part of a church activity, we follow the transportation rule of 3: each vehicle transporting youth or vulnerable adults must have at least three people. That may be two adult leaders and one youth or vulnerable adult, or it may be one adult leader and two youth or vulnerable adults. This rule is waved if a parent is transporting their own child.
- 4) No person shall supervise any age group of children or youth unless he/she is AT LEAST 5 years older than the children or youth.
- 5) The Person in Charge will be responsible for adherence to the Supervision requirements herein.

## REPORTING AND RESPONSE TO INCIDENT/ALLEGATION

- 1) Spirit of Grace requires immediate and specific response to allegations of abuse:
  - a) within the facilities of Spirit of Grace or
  - b) at any and all events sponsored by Spirit of Grace or
  - c) if the adult who observed the abuse is a current staff member of Spirit of Grace.
- 2) Any adult who observes or hears of alleged abuse which falls under conditions described herein [see number 1, a, b, or c, immediately above] shall:<sup>11</sup>
  - a) Assure the safety of the victim.
    - i) Whatever the victim says is to be taken very seriously.
    - ii) Make sure that the victim is in a safe place and watched over.
    - iii) Do not confront the accused abuser with anger or hostility but immediately remove him/ her from further involvement with children and youth until the matter can be investigated.
  - b) Call the police at 911, if there is a situation of immediate risk.
  - c) Report the incident immediately to the pastor (unless implicated in the allegation or unavailable) and/or the Person in Charge (unless implicated in the allegation). Contact the appropriate authorities (if the adult witness is designated as a “mandated or mandatory reporter” by state or federal law).<sup>12</sup>
- 3) The pastor or designee shall:
  - a) Ascertain the general details needed to make an accurate report.
  - b) Within 24 hours, write an incident report. The report should include the following information, if obtainable:<sup>13</sup>
    - i) The name, address, age and sex of the alleged victim;

- ii) The name and address of the alleged victim's parents or other person responsible for his/her care;
  - iii) The nature and extent of the alleged abuse or neglect;
  - iv) Any evidence of previously known or suspected abuse or neglect of the alleged victim or their siblings;
  - v) The name, address and relationship, if known, of the person who is alleged to have perpetrated the abuse or neglect; and
  - vi) Any other information known to the person making the report that would be helpful to the investigation of the alleged abuse.
- c) Contact the appropriate State or law enforcement agency as soon as possible to file the abuse report and provide the aforementioned information and follow the instructions of the agency.
  - d) Report the suspected child abuse to the child's family (unless implicated in the allegation) and any agencies required by law.
- 4) The alleged perpetrators of the abuse are to be excluded from future events involving children, youth and vulnerable adults until the incident report is resolved. In any removal of a person from any activities, care must be taken to handle this in a discreet manner, recognizing that an investigation is being conducted.

## POLICY REVIEW AND DISTRICT REPORTING REQUIREMENTS

This abuse prevention policy will be reviewed annually at the charge or church conference. The reviewing body will include Asbury Our Redeemer Board. An electronic copy or written copy of the policy will be provided each year to the District office.

## CONCLUSION

In all of our ministries we are committed to demonstrating the love of Jesus Christ so that each child, youth, and vulnerable adult is "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, pg 44).

## SIGNATURES

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Rev. David King, Pastor

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Gigi Siekkinen, Staff Parish Relations Chair

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Deborah Chenoweth, Board of Directors Chair

//Signed Copy on file at Spirit of Grace. Adopted 22 May 2016.

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<sup>1</sup> Wrongful restraint means the use of physical (i.e. tying, holding) or chemical (i.e. sedation) means to limit the movement of an adult for the convenience or discipline of a caregiver.

<sup>2</sup> Harm includes taking a child into a dangerous place. In OR, for example, abuse is present when permitting a child to enter or remain in a place where methamphetamines are being manufactured. See ORS 163.537.

<sup>3</sup> Generally, in sexual abuse, a significantly older, more powerful person initiates the behavior. However, please note that prevention also includes preventing peer abuse, including behavior such as inappropriate words or gestures, taking or showing sexually explicit photos of or to a child or youth, or exposing a child or youth to pornography or adult sexual activity. Abuse also occurs in similar situations regarding vulnerable adults where meaningful consent is unlikely.

<sup>4</sup> Many professionals who work in the field understand Prevention as applied in three phases: Primary, Secondary and Tertiary Prevention of Sexual Abuse/Assault. Primary prevention engages everyone to keep sexual violence from happening. See the Center for Disease Control, Sexual Violence Prevention: Beginning the Dialogue, page 3 or link at <http://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/pdf/svprevention-a.pdf>

<sup>5</sup> Primary prevention work is cultural change consistent with the Gospel: God loves each person as God's own. Often referred to as "moving upstream," primary prevention directs us "upstream" to locate the place where the potential for victimization is created through social inequity. This concept is captured in the "Three Sisters" story, as told by Lisa Brunner from the Sacred Spirits First Nations Coalition's "Three Sisters" story, recorded by Oregon Coalition Against Domestic and Sexual Violence in 2012 and located at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1ilyvmXQ3JI>

Each sister represents a stage of prevention: Primary (preventing the violence before it occurs), Secondary (responding in the crisis including bystander intervention); and Tertiary (addressing the longer term impacts of the violence and supporting survivors through trauma). [Adapted from "Primary Prevention," a "paper" of the Oregon Sexual Assault task Force, 2014].

<sup>6</sup> Events will be planned so that issues covered will include diverse and pertinent topics to equip Spirit of Grace to address challenges in prevention strategy. Topics may include: physical plant issues, issues related to various age groups, issues concerning abuse prevention and disabled persons, changes in laws, and other issues.

<sup>7</sup> Such opportunities may take the form of an event or events in Spirit of Grace, or combined with other churches, or on through the District or Annual Conference.

<sup>8</sup> Representation of Spirit of Grace includes speaking or writing on behalf of the ministry to media sources; it may also include serving as chairperson for some committees or projects.



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<sup>9</sup> This training may be incorporated in the educational opportunity set forth in the section above, entitled, “STANDARDS FOR ABUSE AWARENESS AND PREVENTION,” under section #2, but must include some Primary Prevention training and a review of this policy.

<sup>10</sup> Bathroom breaks with children old enough to manage on their own, youth, and vulnerable adults are to be coordinated in such a way that an adult checks the bathroom, then leaves and stands outside as children, youth or vulnerable adults of the same sex use the facility. No adult is to enter during the time the facility is in use unless there are clear indications of an emergency. For babies and younger children, two unrelated adults need to be present when diapers are being changed or at anytime a child needs to have clothes changed.

<sup>11</sup> Falsely filed, malicious reports are illegal. However, unless the report is known beyond any doubt to be false, the process of reporting is required by Spirit of Grace with respect to participation in any judicial proceeding resulting from such report. Any person who reports in bad faith or with malice shall not be protected by this section.” Idaho Code § 16-1606

Similarly, Oregon Law states: “Anyone participating in good faith in making a report of child abuse and who has reasonable grounds for the making thereof shall have immunity from any civil or criminal liability that might otherwise be incurred or imposed with respect to the making or content of such report. Any such participant shall have the same immunity with respect to participating in any judicial proceeding resulting from such report.” Or. Rev. Stat. Ann. §419B.025

<sup>12</sup> Each state has a class of individuals who must report child abuse to the authorities if they are aware of it. Here, Asbury Our Redeemer is reminding those responsible for reporting to follow state law. If you are unsure, please find your state requirements at <https://www.rainn.org/public-policy/laws-in-your-state>. This website is provided by RAINN, the Rape, Abuse & Incest National Network.

At the time of this writing, Oregon law includes:

Medical personnel: Physicians, psychiatrists, surgeons, residents, interns, dentists, dentist hygienists, medical examiners, pathologists, osteopaths, coroners, Christian Science practitioners, chiropractors, podiatrists, optometrists, naturopathic physicians, registered and licensed practical nurses, emergency medical technicians, substance abuse treatment personnel, hospital administrators, physical, speech and occupational therapists, and other personnel involved in the examination, care or treatment of patients.

School and child care personnel: Teachers, school personnel, educational advocates assigned to a child pursuant to the School Code, truant officers, directors and staff assistants of day care centers and nursery schools.

Public employees: Members of the Legislative Assembly, employees of the State Commission on Children and Families, the Child Care Division of the Employment Department, the Oregon Youth Authority, a county health department, a community mental health and developmental disabilities program, a county juvenile department, and all DHS employees.

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Law Enforcement: Truant officers, probation officers, law enforcement officers, and field personnel of the Department of Corrections.

Others: Psychologists, licensed clinical social workers, licensed professional counselors, licensed marriage and family therapists, members of the clergy, attorneys, firefighters, court appointed special advocates, registered or certified child care providers, and foster care providers and their employees. [http://www.oregon.gov/DHS/abuse/pages/mandatory\\_report.aspx](http://www.oregon.gov/DHS/abuse/pages/mandatory_report.aspx)

<sup>13</sup> Spirit of Grace will file the appropriate report. However, under no circumstances will staff or volunteers will take it upon themselves to launch an investigation outside of the general inquiry needed to write an incident report. If facts or unobtainable or someone resists, the person filing the report should note these facts without making demands or confronting the person who refused to answer.