

## Statement of Child Abuse Prevention

### Introduction

The General Conference of The United Methodist Church, in April 1996, adopted a resolution aimed at reducing the risk of child sexual abuse in the church. The adopted resolution includes the following statement:

Jesus said, "Whoever welcomes (a) child...welcomes me." (Matthew 18:5) Children are our present and our future, our hope, our teachers, our inspiration. They are full participants in the life of the church and in the realm of God.

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 you neck and you were drowned in the depth of the sea." (Matthew 18:6) Our Christian faith calls us to offer both hospitality and protection to the little ones, the children. The Social Principles of The United Methodist Church state that "...children must be protected from economic, physical and Sexual exploitation, and abuse."

Tragically, churches have not always been safe places for children. Child sexual abuse, exploitation and ritual abuse (ritual abuse refers to abusive acts committed as part of ceremonies or rites; ritual abusers are often related to cults, or pretend to be) occur in churches, both large and small, urban and rural. The problem cuts across all economic, cultural and racial lines. It is real, and it appears to be increasing. Most annual conferences can site specific incidents of child sexual abuse and exploitation in their churches. Virtually every congregation has among its members adult survivors of early sexual trauma.

Such incidents are devastating to all who are involved: the child, the family, the local church and its leaders. Increasingly, churches are torn apart by the legal, emotional and monetary consequences of litigation following allegations of abuse.

God calls us to make our churches safe places, protecting children and other vulnerable persons from sexual and ritual abuse. God calls us to create communities of faith where children and adults grow safe and strong. (From *The Book of Resolutions of The United Methodist Church 1996*. Copyright 1996 by The United Methodist Publishing House. Used by permission. (pp 384-386)

Thus, in covenant with all United Methodist congregations, St. James UMC will adopt a policy for the prevention of child abuse in our church.

### Purpose

Our congregation's purpose for establishing a Child Protection Policy is to demonstrate our absolute and unwavering commitment to the physical safety and spiritual growth of all of our children and youth.

### Statement of Covenant

Therefore, as a Christian community of faith and a United Methodist congregation, St. James UMC pledges to conduct the ministry of the gospel in ways that assure the safety and spiritual growth of all of our children and youth as well as the workers with children and youth. We will follow reasonable safety measures in the selection and recruitment of workers and we will provide our workers with children and youth a copy of the Child Protection Policy. We will have a clearly defined procedure for reporting a suspected incident of abuse that conforms with the requirements of state law.

### Conclusion

In all of our ministries with children and youth, this congregation 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).

**ST. JAMES UNITED METHODIST CHURCH**  
**CHILD PROTECTION POLICY**  
(Approved November 19, 2006)

The following policy applies to children from birth through 18 years.

In general, with paid St. James UMC Childcare employees, the ratio of children to childcare worker will be one adult to four toddlers, and one adult to five children two years old and older.

Childcare will always be provided in close proximity to other church activities to ensure the safety of all. Close proximity means on the same level and the same wing of the building in which other activities are located. Childcare will be moved if necessary to remain close to church activities.

Background checks are required for all paid employees; St. James UMC Childcare employees, St. James UMC staff and St. James UMC Preschool staff. Background checks will be required for Sunday school teachers and other volunteers working with children and youth. Background checks will be reviewed solely by the Senior Pastor and the chair of the SPRC committee. Any action is at the discretion of the Senior Pastor.

Sunday School teachers who work alone should call on teachers in neighboring classrooms as necessary to ensure that all children are safely supervised at all times.

Suspected incidents of abuse should be reported immediately to the Senior Minister of the church. The Senior Minister will notify the Department of Family and Children's Services. (The telephone number for DFCS is 404-699-4399.)