

The Charlotte District E-Pistle

October 6, 2004

Does your congregation have in clearly in place all the principles and practices that constitute our Conference-approved *Safe Sanctuaries Policy*? If this question requires from you the candid response, "I am not sure," then your church most probably does not comply with these regulations.

On October 23, 9 a.m. - Noon, at Providence United Methodist Church, the Charlotte District will sponsor a "safe sanctuaries" workshop. Our special guest is David Warren—a recognized authority on how to prepare a church for meeting the requirements for this crucial designation. Over seventy-five leaders have been trained in our Conference, and some of these will be at the workshop to assist David.

Preparing your congregation to be a safe sanctuary is not an optional issue. Petition #18 was ordered to record by a vote of the 2004 Annual Conference meeting at Lake Junaluska. Since all our churches must have in place such procedures and policies that constitute a **safe sanctuary** environment by December 31, 2005, we must start now in providing the training for leaders in children and youth ministries. Next fall you will be required in your Charge Conference report to substantiate your progress toward achieving this reality.

No one can wave a magic wand and accomplish this protective status in a church. The process requires diligent work. Start by sending a team from your congregation to the workshop on October 23rd. We may have to repeat this workshop experience until every church has been trained; but it is far better to start now.

Some of our churches are way ahead of the curve on this one. The tragic occurrences at Myers Park Presbyterian Church are the horrifying results of not having in place a thorough screening process for the authorization of volunteers to work among children and youth. That incident teaches us that we cannot be too careful. Members who resist this requirement of scrutiny just do not understand the vulnerable context in which most church programs currently operate.

I encourage you to do the following four things in order to begin your preparation:

- 1) Check out the **conference web site** @ www.wnccumc.org > ministries > youth ministries > safe sanctuaries. You will find a basic policy and basic essential procedures on the web site that you can download to work from, as well as a list of your district's trainers and their e-mail addresses.
- 2) Start "**advertising**" at your church that you will be working on a children and youth protection policy and procedures for the church and that they will need to be **approved and implemented by December 31, 2005** per the amendment at Annual Conference 2004.

3) Purchase a copy of Joy Melton's book "Safe Sanctuaries" for either children or youth and use that, along with the information you can download off the web site.

4) Form a small task force (4-5 people) from your church to begin working on the details of the procedures for the church.

Who should be on the team? Pastors will certainly benefit and will need this information in order to guide the process. Your local church task force should include people who have a heart for this project, who work with youth and children, perhaps a trustee, possibly a scout leader or a lawyer if you have them in your church. Leaders in children and youth ministry, as well as directors of preschool and kindergarten programs are essential to the team. Many of our churches will need to change safety conditions of the church building, with particular attention to doors and playground equipment.

Once you have done the four things above, you may contact your district trainers for assistance. You are also welcome to contact the office of Katie Fralic if you have additional questions. She can be reached at the WNCC Office of Ministries with Young People > 1-800-562-7929 Ext. 117 or Ext. 125
kfralic@wncumc.org

I am attaching a copy of the petition that we passed in June. I encourage you to make copies of this for circulation among the persons you recruit for attendance at the district workshop.

I really wish that this issue were not a part of our crowded United Methodist Church agenda. After all, we work among the finest discipleship corps of laity in the entire country. But it only takes one exception to our pristine ministry among children and youth to mar the reputation of a church for generations to come.

I urge you to give aggressive leadership to guiding your congregation toward making your church truly a safe sanctuary so that any child or youth who enters a program of ministry there will participate in the security of God's redemptive Kingdom.

Grace and peace,

George

Petition #18

Western North Carolina Annual Conference Policy “Safe Sanctuary”: A Protection Policy for Children and Youth

Whereas, The 1996 General Conference of The United Methodist Church adopted a resolution aimed at reducing the risk of any type of abuse of children and youth in the church, including neglect and physical, emotional, sexual, or ritual abuse; and

Whereas, Jesus said, “Whoever welcomes a child welcomes me ... 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 your neck and you were drowned in the depth of the sea” (Matthew 18:5-6); and

Whereas, Children are our present and our future, our hope, our teachers, and our inspiration, full participants in the life of the church and the realm of God; and

Whereas, Our Christian faith calls us to offer both hospitality and protection to the little ones, the children; and

Whereas, The Social Principles of The United Methodist Church affirm that “children must be protected from economic, physical, emotional, and sexual exploitation and abuse” (§ 162C); and

Whereas, Churches have tragically not always been safe places for children, inasmuch as child sexual abuse, exploitation, and ritual abuse (abusive acts committed as part of ceremonies or rites) occur in churches, both large and small, urban and rural; and

Whereas, the problem just described cuts across all economic, cultural, and racial lines, is real, and appears to be increasing; and

Whereas, Most United Methodist annual conferences can cite incidents of child sexual abuse and exploitation within churches, and virtually every congregation has among its members adult survivors of early sexual trauma; and

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

Whereas, God calls us to make our churches safe places where children and other vulnerable persons are protected from sexual and ritual abuse and where children and adults grow safe and strong (cf. *The Book of Resolutions of The United Methodist Church (2000)*, pages 180-81); and

Whereas, In all of its ministries with children and youth, the Western North Carolina Annual Conference of The United Methodist Church is committed to demonstrating the love of Jesus Christ, so that each child and youth will be “surrounded by steadfast love, established in the faith, and confirmed and strengthened in the way that leads to life eternal” (Congregational Pledge 2 in Baptismal Covenant II, *The United Methodist Hymnal*, page 44); and

Whereas, Faithful stewardship of the ministry with which the annual conference has been entrusted requires that the safety and well being of all its constituents be ensured; and

Whereas, The Western North Carolina Conference and its program agencies desire to establish a Protection Policy for Children and Youth Events, Camps, and Local Churches to demonstrate the absolute and unwavering commitment of the conference to the physical safety and spiritual growth of all its children and youth; and

Whereas, All agencies and entities in the life of the church which work with children and youth need a policy to serve as a guideline for children, youth, and the adults that work with them, in order to enable the optimum safety of all participants;
therefore, be it resolved, that the Western North Carolina Annual Conference:

- a. Direct its conference and district program agencies which work with children and youth at events and camps, in covenant with the United Methodist Church, to adopt the following policy by December 31, 2005, in order that abuse of children and youth in all conference and district-related settings may be prevented to the fullest extent possible:

As a Christian community of faith, we pledge to conduct the ministry of the gospel in ways that assure the safety and spiritual growth of all children and youth, as well as those who work with them. We will follow reasonable safety measures in the selection and recruitment of staff. We will implement prudent operational procedures in all programs, events, and camps. We will educate all our workers with children and youth regarding the use of all appropriate policies and methods. We will have a clearly defined procedure for reporting a suspected incident of abuse that conforms to the requirements of state law, and we will be prepared to respond to media inquiries if an incident occurs.

- b. **Direct all local churches of the conference to adopt for themselves the policy just stated and direct its Office of Youth Ministries to provide training in the districts, at the expense of each district, to help local churches establish and implement “Safe Sanctuary” policies and procedures by December 31, 2005.**

Endorsed by:

The WNCC Office of Youth Ministries and the Conference Council on Youth Ministries
The WNCC Office of Christian Education and the Conference Children’s Council
The Western North Carolina Conference Cabinet (1/5/04)

Adapted from Youth Abuse Prevention Policy, Safe Sanctuaries for Youth: Reducing the Risk of Abuse in Youth Ministries by Joy Thornburg Melton, Discipleship Resources, 2003.

