

## **RESOLUTION TO 2023 ANNUAL CONFERENCE SESSION**

### **Resolution To add a Vulnerable Adult Policy of the Eastern Pennsylvania Conference of the United Methodist Church**

**WHEREAS, Eastern Pennsylvania Conference of the United Methodist Church is committed to creating safe sanctuaries and**

**WHEREAS, there is no current policy that covers the safety of vulnerable adults and**

**WHEREAS, current issues of abuse with vulnerable adults and current legal standards justifies the need to have a policy for vulnerable adults**

**THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, that the Eastern PA Conference adopt the below Vulnerable Adults Policy for use in congregations."**

**Person(s) Responsible for Presenting Resolution: Rev. Jacqueline D. Daniszewski**

#### **Eastern PA United Methodist Conference Safe Sanctuaries Vulnerable Adults Policy**

*Note: What follows is policy for local churches to utilize in adopting policies to protect vulnerable adults. It is not meant as legal advice, nor is it intended to cover every situation. For example, if a local church operates an "older adult daily living center", a "personal care home" or other facility as that term is defined in the Pennsylvania Adult Protective Services Act or the Older Adults Protective Services Act, additional requirements may apply.*

*Additionally, this policy is meant to start the conversation. Safe Sanctuaries is a process, not a product. Allow your congregation the time to analyze how best to do ministry in a manner that is safe for all of God's children.*

Because the tragedy of abuse of Vulnerable Adults is a reality in our world, and because we recognize the spiritual imperative to provide a safe and protect environment, the conference has developed this Vulnerable Adults Policy to realize our commitment to the safety and spiritual growth of Vulnerable Adults in our activities.

The church, at all levels of its organization, is entrusted with the responsibility of providing an emotionally and physically safe, spiritually grounded, healthy environment for activities of Vulnerable Adults, in which they are protected from abuse.

**Abuse** means the willful infliction of physical pain or injury or mental anguish, unreasonable confinement, or the willful deprivation of services which are necessary to maintain a person's mental and physical health.

**Exploitation** means the act or process of illegally or improperly using a person or his resources for another person's profit or advantage.

**Neglect** means an act or failure to act which results in the inadequate provision of care or services necessary to maintain the physical and mental health of the vulnerable adult, and which places the vulnerable adult in a situation which can result in serious injury, or which is life-threatening.

**Staff Person** – Any person employed by the Church who is responsible for overseeing organized activities of Vulnerable Adults. Throughout this document “Staff” will be interpreted to mean each staff person.

**Volunteer** – A person, eighteen (18) years of age or older, who assists in conducting organized activities of Vulnerable Adults.

**Vulnerable Adult** means a person, eighteen (18) years of age or older who has a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activities. (Adult Protective Services Act of 2010).

### **Rules for Ministry with Vulnerable Adults**

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1. This policy – including reporting procedures – is mandatory for all Staff and Volunteers. Failure to comply with this policy may result in disciplinary action, up to and including termination. Each congregation shall ensure that all staff and Volunteers are provided with a copy of this policy.
2. No Staff Person or Volunteer may engage in any form of neglect, abuse, or exploitation of a Vulnerable Adult.
3. Persons leading any group containing Vulnerable Adults must be 18 years of age or older.

Volunteers and Staff Person(s) will undergo appropriate background checks as stated in the Child and Youth Safe Sanctuaries policy. No individual may serve as a Volunteer or Staff person if such individual has been convicted of an offense that would disqualify them from employment at a facility under the Older Adults Protective Services Act (<https://www.legis.state.pa.us/cfdocs/legis/LI/uconsCheck.cfm?txtType=HTM&yr=1987&sessInd=0&smthLwInd=0&act=79&chpt=5&sctn=3&subsctn=0>). Note that this list differs from the list of disqualifying offenses for those who work with Children so both lists need to be checked if volunteers and/or staff are working with both groups.

1. The two-adult rule – Regardless of the size group, there will always be at least two adults present. This may include the presence of an adult ‘roamer’ who moves in and out of rooms/ministry activities. These adults are to be non-related.
2. Attendance, including of Staff Person(s) and Volunteers, should be taken at every church function where a Vulnerable Adult is present records of attendance should be retained as stated in the Child and Youth Safe Sanctuaries policy.

## **Reporting Procedures**

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Any staff person or volunteer who suspects incidents of Abuse, Neglect, or Exploitation of a vulnerable adult shall report to the Adult Protective Services hotline at 1-800-490-8505 and to the pastor, who shall notify the appropriate district superintendent. If the pastor is suspected to be involved in the Abuse, Neglect or Exploitation, the staff person or volunteer shall report to the Adult Protective Services hotline and report to the SPRC chair, who shall be responsible for notifying the district superintendent.

## **Response Procedures**

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Staff or volunteers should not undertake an investigation of the incident themselves. This is the role of Adult Protective Services and various county protective agencies. However, in all cases of reported Neglect, Abuse, or Exploitation of Vulnerable Adults, all Staff Persons and Volunteers shall cooperate with all official investigating agencies.

## **Response to the Media**

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In consultation with the presiding bishop, the District Superintendent, the Conference Director of Communications, and pastor shall decide on a single spokesperson for contact with the public/media. All media requests for statements shall be directed to that spokesperson.

## **Older Adults**

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**This policy also applies to any adult 60 years or older who experiences abuse, neglect or exploitation as defined above.**

When individuals 60 years or older experience any of the listed causes of concern above, follow the response and reporting procedures above. In those cases where ministry is occurring and there is increased risk of abuse, neglect or exploitation of an individual 60 years or older, church leaders should use this policy to help mitigate that risk.

## **Further Resources:**

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The Book of Resolutions of The United Methodist Church: Reducing the Risk of Child Sexual Abuse in the Church (<https://www.umc.org/en/content/book-of-resolutions-reducing-the-risk-of-child-sexual-abuse-in-the-church>) (“God calls us to make our congregations 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.”)

Pennsylvania Older Adults Protective Services Act

<https://www.legis.state.pa.us/cfdocs/Legis/LI/uconsCheck.cfm?txtType=HTM&yr=1987&sessInd=0&smthLwInd=0&act=0079>

Pennsylvania Adult Protective Services Act

<https://www.legis.state.pa.us/cfdocs/legis/li/uconsCheck.cfm?yr=2010&sessInd=0&act=70>