

August 17, 2009

RE: Protection Policy

Greetings –

If you are receiving or have downloaded this packet at this time, it is an indication that you are actively involved with a ministry opportunity at Bethesda E.C. Church of Reedsville involving children and/or youth.

Many months ago, a dialog began within the executive board of the Christian Education Committee pertaining to the need of a **Children and Youth Protection Policy**. Unfortunately, in this day and age, these steps are being taken by many churches and other ministries. Abuse of children and youth does not have boundaries; therefore, there are no perfect safe havens – not even the sanctuary of the church.

A policy as been developed, presented and approved to be utilized at Bethesda. This policy has not been created because there are problems, but in order for us to do our best to prevent possible problems in this area. Ideally, we as a local body are taking offensive actions in order to protect our children and youth rather than be defensive or reactive when/if an unfortunate abuse situation would occur.

The enclosed letter has information pertaining to how volunteer and paid workers involved with our children and youth ministries should handle possible cases of abuse. There are also forms which must be completed: *Employment/Volunteer Application*, *Primary Screening Form for Children or Youth Work*, *Request for Criminal Records Check and Authorization*, and an *Application Statement*. Again, this policy and these forms are not to deter you from becoming or maintaining involvement with children or youth ministries here at Bethesda, rather it is for the protection of our children, youth, and employed and volunteer workers, as well as this church body.

The Official Board – which ultimately approved this policy – also agreed to pay the \$10.00 fee associated with the *Request for Criminal Records Check* to be submitted on-line through Pennsylvania Assess To Criminal History (PATCH), a link through the PA State Police web page. If you would want to reimburse the church for this amount, please place cash or check (payable to Bethesda E.C. Church) in an envelope accompanying your completed forms when you submit them to the office of Pastor Todd.

I trust that you understand why these policy steps are being taken at Bethesda. If you would have any concerns or questions pertaining to this matter, do not hesitate to contact any member of the CE executive board: Curt Behler, Joel Holubec, LaVerne Houtz, Chelly Miller, Janet Stoyer or Todd Wolfe.

Thank you for your attention to, and the completion of, this policy.

Submitted on Behalf of the Executive Board of the Christian Education Committee.

SAFEGUARDING OUR CHILDREN

“This could never happen in our church.” This might be your response when hearing about cases of child physical and/or sexual abuse. It seems almost impossible that such a heinous activity could taint our community of faith. But it can. Incidents of child sexual abuse cut across every racial, social, economic and religious boundary.

Often, we in the church have a false sense of security about this problem. As a result, preventative steps may be neglected. Our stereotypes often bolster this sense of security. The child molester is viewed as a predatory stranger who can easily be spotted by the church family. The sad truth is 80% of child sexual abuse is perpetrated by someone the child knows and trusts ... a parent, teacher, coach, and yes, a church child or youth worker.

Physical and/or sexual abuse strikes youth from every social background, race, and age. Often it occurs in settings where children and youth completely trust adults - homes, schools, camps, athletic and park programs, and most sadly, the church. Abuse is devastating. It causes deep and sometimes lifelong psychological damage to the victim.

Physical and/or sexual abuse of children and youth can happen in any church setting - including ours. A profound legal and moral obligation exists to reduce the possibility of abuse from ever occurring. Bethesda Reedsville Evangelical Congregational Church desires to be a safe place for all children and youth who attend. We believe that preventative steps can be taken to promote the safety of children and youth, as well as those who volunteer to work with them. The purpose of this policy is to help make Bethesda Reedsville E.C. church the safest place possible for our children and youth.

ΔChildren have neither power nor property. Voices other than their own must speak for them. If these voices are silent, then children who have been abused may lean their heads against window panes and taste the bitter emptiness of violated childhoods.”

- Justice Francis T. Murphy

Let our **“It could never happen here”** attitude become
“We won’t let it happen here!”

RECRUITING AND SELECTING CHURCH WORKERS

1. All paid church employees, clergy, and regular volunteers who may work with the children and youth (those under eighteen years) of Bethesda E.C. Church must undergo a thorough screening process as a part of the job application procedure.

The screening process for paid church employees, clergy, and volunteers includes:

- A. An Employment/Volunteer Application
 - B. A Primary Screening Form
 - C. Three Character References
 - D. Pennsylvania State Police Request for Criminal Record Check
 - E. *Pennsylvania Child Abuse History Clearance Form*
 - F. A personal interview with a salaried member of the pastoral staff following the receipt of the various forms.
2. New volunteer staff will be considered only after they have been actively involved in the life of Bethesda E.C. Church for a minimum of six months.
 3. Any church employee, clergy, or volunteer with criminal abuse convictions or under investigation for same will not be accepted to work with children or youth.
 4. All church employees, clergy, and volunteers must sign a statement agreeing to follow all church policies with respect to working with children and youth.
 5. All records of workers applications, references, and screening forms will be maintained by the Pastor(s) in a confidential manner in a secure location with no access to unauthorized individuals.

Recommendation:

The PA State Police Request for Criminal Record Check and PA Child Abuse History Clearance Form shall be updated for all church employees, clergy, and volunteers who work with children and/or youth every three years.

CHURCH WORKERS' SUPERVISION GUIDELINES

1. Use a team approach. There should be two individuals present during any church activity involving children and/or youth. It is preferable that one of the adults be over 18 years of age.
2. There are situations when an adult has legitimate reasons to be alone with a child or youth. The child or youth, whenever possible, should be the same gender as the adult. The adult must in advance of the proposed activity make every effort to receive consent from the guardian/parent of the child/youth.
3. An annual Parental Consent/Medical Release Form should be completed and kept on file for each child/youth who is participating in a church activity taking place away from church property. These completed forms must be accessible to chaperones/leaders during activities taking place away from church property.
4. Adult workers shall make every attempt to meet with children and youth in a well-lighted area, in view of others.
5. Any inappropriate conduct between an adult worker and a child/youth will be confronted and investigated by a salaried member of the pastoral staff immediately. Any violations will result in immediate termination and may result in criminal charges.
6. All adult workers should attend informational meetings that may be held related to new procedures and methods pertaining to the protection policy and screening process.
7. Adult supervision must be maintained before and after all activities until all children/youth have left.
8. Special procedures shall apply to all overnight activities. All adult chaperones and supervisors must be cleared in advance with a salaried member of the pastoral staff. No last minute adult guests! The following procedure must also be cleared in advance:
 - A. The specific proposed activity
 - B. The location of the proposed activity
 - C. The goal or objective to be realized in the proposed activity
 - D. The manner of transport to and from the proposed activity.

REPORTING OF POSSIBLE ABUSE

1. All reports of possible child/youth abuse or Children and Youth Protection Policy violation must be immediately communicated to a salaried member of the pastoral staff. In cases of abuse allegations, the pastoral contact must then report the abuse allegations to the Department of Public Welfare as well as to the appropriate local child protective services.
2. If the pastor is the accused of the abuse allegations, reporting should be made to the official structure president who will then report to the Regional Conference Minister.
3. All above workers must be familiar with Chapter 3490 of the PA Child Protective Service Regulations in regards to reporting possible child abuse, a summarized procedural packet which is on file in the church office.
4. All paid church employees, clergy, and volunteers (regular and occasional) who may work with the children and youth of Bethesda E.C. Church must be familiar with possible indicators and symptoms of child physical and/or sexual abuse, definitions and explanations put forth in the procedural packet which is on file in the church office.
5. All reports in regards to abuse or policy violation must be documented in writing by a salaried member of the pastoral staff.

RESPONDING TO POSSIBLE ABUSE

IF AN ALLEGATION OCCURS:

1. All efforts at handling the incident must be documented.
2. The incident must be reported immediately to a salaried member of the pastoral staff, who will then report the incident to those necessary with the Department of Public Welfare the local agency of Children and Youth in order to maintain confidentiality and avoidance of allegations of liability. (The situation should not be handled without professional outside assistance; *i.e. Conference Attorney.*)
3. Following the guidance received from the initial reporting on behalf of the pastoral staff, proper civil authorities must be contacted. (An in-depth investigation should not be attempted - this should be left to professionals who are familiar with these cases.)
4. The parents or legal guardians must be notified as/when recommended by the professionals handling the abuse allegation/case .
5. Confrontation of the accused must not be done until the safety of the child or youth is secured.
6. The situation should not be prejudged, but any allegations must be taken seriously.
7. If the accused is a volunteer church worker, that person must be relieved temporarily of his/her duty until the investigation is finished. If the accused is a paid church employee, arrangements should be made to either maintain or suspend his/her income until the allegations are cleared or substantiated; these decisions made under the direction and guidance received from the Bishop and/or Regional Conference Minister of the E.C. denomination.
8. A designated spokesperson should be recommended and empowered by the governing structure of the local church in order to address issues related to the media, the public, and the congregation. (Care should be taken to safeguard the privacy and confidentiality of all involved.)

EMPLOYMENT/VOLUNTEER APPLICATION

Name: _____
Last First Middle

Address: _____
Street City State Zip

How long have you lived at this address? _____

Phone -- (Day): _____ (Evening): _____

Identity must be confirmed with a state driver license or other legal identification bearing a photograph. Do you have a current driver license? If yes, please list your driver license number: _____

Have you ever been convicted of or pleaded guilty to a crime? _____ If yes, explain:

Education:

School Name and Location: _____ *Year Completed:* _____

Elementary: _____

High School: _____

College: _____

Graduate Studies: _____

Employment:

Company Name: _____

Address: _____ Phone #: _____

Name of Supervisor: _____

Job Description:

Christian Background: _____

Briefly state your Christian testimony:

Name of church in which you are currently a member:

Church Name: _____

Address: _____ Phone: _____

Pastors Name: _____

Please list the names of churches you have attended regularly in the past 5 years:

Church Name: _____

Address: _____ Phone: _____

Church Name: _____

Address: _____ Phone: _____

Church Name: _____

Address: _____ Phone: _____

Personal References (not former employers or relatives):

Name: _____ Phone: _____

Address: _____

Name: _____ Phone: _____

Address: _____

Name: _____ Phone: _____

Address: _____

Primary Screening Form for Children or Youth Work
(Confidential)

This application is to be completed by all applicants for any reason (volunteer or compensated) involving the supervision or custody of minors. This is not an employment application form. Persons seeking a position in the church as a paid employee will be required to complete an employment application in addition to this screening form. It is being used to help the church provide a safe and secure environment for those children and youth who participate in our programs and use our facilities.

Personal:

Date: _____

Name: _____
Last First Middle

Identity must be confirmed with a state driver license or other photographic identification:

Present Address: _____

Home Phone: _____

Please indicate the type of children and/or youth work you prefer:

Please indicate the date you would be able to begin:

Have you ever been convicted of or pleaded guilty to a crime? _____ If yes, please explain:

Were you a victim of abuse or molestation while a minor?

If you prefer, you may refuse to answer this question, or you may discuss your answer in confidence with the Pastor rather than answering it on this form. By answering yes or leaving the question unanswered you will NOT automatically be disqualified as an applicant for children and/or youth work.

Prior Children and/or Youth Work:

List all previous church work involving children and/or youth:

Church Name: _____

Address: _____ Phone: _____

Position & Responsibilities:

Dates of involvement: _____ to _____

Church Name: _____

Address: _____ Phone: _____

Position & Responsibilities:

Dates of involvement: _____ to _____

Church Name: _____

Address: _____ Phone: _____

Position & Responsibilities:

Dates of involvement: _____ to _____

List all previous non-church work involving children and/or youth:

Organization Name: _____

Address: _____ Phone: _____

Position & Responsibilities:

Dates of involvement: _____ to _____

Organization Name: _____

Address: _____ Phone: _____

Position & Responsibilities:

Dates of involvement: _____ to _____

List any callings, training, education or other factors that have prepared you for children or youth work:

Request for Criminal Records Check and Authorization

I hereby request the PA State Police Department to release any information which pertains to any record of convictions contained in its files or in any criminal file maintained on me whether local, state, or national. I hereby release said Police Department from any and all liability resulting from such disclosure.

Print Name: _____

Signature: _____

Print maiden name: _____

Print all aliases: _____

Date of birth: _____

Place of birth: _____

Social Security Number: _____

Today's Date: _____

Record sent to:

Name: _____

Address: _____

Applicant' s Statement

*The information contained in this application is correct to the best of my knowledge. I authorize any references, churches, employers listed in this application to give you any information (including opinions) that they may have regarding any character and fitness for children and/or youth work. In consideration of the receipt and evaluation of this form by a salaried member of the pastoral staff of Bethesda E.C. Church, I hereby release any individual, church, youth organization, including record custodians, both collectively and individually, from any and all liability for damages of whatever kind or nature which may at any time result to me, my heirs, or family, from compliance or any attempts to comply, with this authorization.

*Should my application be accepted, I agree to be bound by the Discipline of the Bethesda E.C. Church and by the By-Laws, policies, and Ministry Manual of Bethesda E.C. Church, and to refrain from any unscriptural conduct in the performance of my services on behalf of the church.

*I further state that I HAVE CAREFULLY READ THE FOREGOING RELEASE AND KNOW THE CONTENTS THEREOF AND I SIGN THIS RELEASE AS MY OWN FREE ACT. NOTE: MY SIGNATURE ON THIS FORM CONFIRMS MY UNDERSTANDING AND AGREEMENT THAT: (1) IN THE EVENT ALLEGATIONS OF CRIMINAL OR SEXUAL MISCONDUCT ARISE REGARDING MY CONDUCT WHILE I SERVE IN THE ABOVE DESCRIBED CAPACITY, THE CHURCH WILL FULLY COOPERATE WITH ANY ENSUING INVESTIGATION AND/OR PROSECUTION; AND (2) THE CHURCH WILL HAVE THE RIGHT TO ANNOUNCE THE FACTS/RESULTS OF SAME PUBLICLY IF DEEMED NECESSARY OR APPROPRIATE BY CHURCH LEADERSHIP.

This is a legally binding agreement which I have read and understand.

Applicant ' s Signature: _____

Date: _____

Witness: _____

Date: _____