

General of the 9th Judicial District of the State of Tennessee, churchworkers legally may report suspected abuse to the Senior Pastor and Chairperson of the Staff-Parish Committee rather than directly to the Tennessee Department of Children's Services and/or local law enforcement authorities. The Senior Pastor and Chairperson will then be responsible for reporting to the Tennessee Department of Children's Services and/or local law enforcement authorities.

Responding

The first element of response is proper reporting, first to the Senior Pastor or Chairperson of the Staff Parish Committee and then, if necessary, to the District Superintendent and/or government authorities. The second element is to provide proper counseling and prayerful assistance to the victim or alleged victim. The third element is to conduct a hearing that is equally fair to the victim, accuser, and accused. The fourth element, as prescribed in "Central United Methodist Church Harassment, Sexual Abuse, and Worker Sexual Misconduct Policies and Procedures" is corrective action which may include: verbal warning, written warning, reprimand, education or training, referral to mediation or counseling, reparations, suspension without pay, demotion, and/or termination. Civil and criminal penalties may follow as a result of reporting alleged incidents to proper government authorities. Any churchworker found guilty of (a) failing to report an allegation of sexual misconduct or abuse, (b) retaliating against a person reporting suspected misconduct or abuse, or (c) deliberately filing a false allegation will be dealt with in the same manner as any person accused of sexual misconduct or abuse.

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).