



# JOHN WESLEY METHODIST CHURCH

HOW ONE CHURCH DEVOTED ITSELF TO  
PROTECTING AND SERVING CHILDREN IN  
THEIR COMMUNITY

2020 CHILD PROTECTION CASE STUDY



**DARKNESS TO LIGHT**<sup>®</sup>  
TWO DECADES OF PREVENTING CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE

## THE ISSUE

In August 2006, Darkness to Light hosted its annual month-long Prevent-A-Thon, a fundraiser dedicated to raising awareness of the prevalence and consequences of child sexual abuse. Darkness to Light offered free *Stewards of Children*<sup>®</sup> trainings throughout the month to empower adults in the community to prevent child sexual abuse. This event caught Hope Murphy's attention. Learning about the harmful effects of child sexual abuse deeply impacted Murphy as both a mother of two children and the Director of Children's Ministries at John Wesley Methodist Church.

Murphy knew that John Wesley serves over 200 kids every year through their Sunday school classes, high school and middle school youth groups, nursery, day schools, summer camps, local and international mission trips, vacation bible school, and music camps. Each of these programs are ran by 200 to 300 adult volunteers every year. These numbers motivated Hope to ensure that the church was a genuinely safe space for children to live, learn, and play.

## THE MOVEMENT

Murphy came back to her leadership team with recommendations on how to improve their church's policies, environment, and prevention culture. Murphy wanted to do more than check a box; she wanted to create a culture of prevention within their church so that everyone felt safe. She believed that no congregation could financially, ethically, or morally afford to fail to implement strategies that reduce and prevent child sexual abuse. She shared information from both Darkness to Light and Safe Sanctuaries to demonstrate the significance and importance of child sexual abuse prevention.<sup>1</sup> This got the ball rolling.

In June 2007, the United Methodist Church Conference passed a resolution that all churches in the South Carolina Conference had

to have a child protection policy in place by the end of 2008 as part of their annual check off.<sup>2</sup> In addition to the resolution, insurance companies and other churches began dedicating time to child sexual abuse prevention. Due to Darkness to Light and Murphy's dedication to child sexual abuse prevention, John Wesley was already ahead of the game. The Children's Council at John Wesley had already begun working on new child protection policies for their church and training adults in *Stewards of Children*<sup>®</sup>.

**“Stewards of Children<sup>®</sup> is such a great tool. It takes a really horrible, overwhelming statistic and reality in our world and allows you to come out feeling empowered to be a part of the solution. There's a part of *Stewards of Children*<sup>®</sup> that's missing in other trainings – you acknowledge the tragedy, walk out of the training, and know that there's something you can do.”**

**– Hope Murphy, Director of Children's Ministries**

During the United Methodist Church conference, Murphy was able to work with other churches in her district to improve their child protection policies and practices. *Stewards of Children*<sup>®</sup> touched on all of the mandates that the church had to meet, including the necessity of background checks, interviewing their volunteers, re-trainings, and continuously updating policies. As their partnership with Darkness to Light continues to grow, John Wesley's prevention initiatives have also grown. The church introduced the Darkness to Light's *Bystanders Protecting Children from Boundary Violations* module into their trainings, a code of conduct for their church, and a protective social media policy.



## THE RESULT

Since John Wesley and Darkness to Light began their partnership, the church has adapted their physical environment to ensure that any interpersonal situation with children can be interrupted and observed. One of the first obvious changes is that every adult, at every level of the organization from the governing board to the senior leadership team, are asked about the appropriate steps to take to ensure that they can properly protect children in their roles. John Wesley has four Darkness to Light Authorized Facilitators, including Murphy, who have trained over 500 people in the church and even more within the community.

**“We’ve created a group of people who know they can talk to any adult in our church and they will say the same things because we have the same words, resources, and tools due to *Stewards of Children*<sup>®</sup>. We talk about risk the same way and look at the opportunities for prevention within our church. We’ve made it too much of a thing here and I’m grateful.”**

**– Hope Murphy, Director of Children’s Ministries**

John Wesley Methodist Church has maintained their community of prevention by consistently achieving Partners in Prevention status. They also proudly showcase the people who have been trained in *Stewards of Children*<sup>®</sup> by having them stand up during worship. As the years go on, there are more and more people who stand than those who sit in the pews, which continues to motivate more adults to be trained. Trainings are offered at no cost once a month or more frequently during peak times for adults within the church and community.

