Pending court approval of a settlement agreement in the Boy Scouts of America (BSA) bankruptcy case, United Methodists have agreed to contribute $30 million to a $3 billion Survivor Trust Fund that will receive contributions from the Boy Scouts of America (BSA), insurance companies, and charter organizations. In exchange for the contribution of United Methodists, the intent of the agreement is that all United Methodist entities will be released from any claims against them, and from existing state court litigation cases. Every annual conference is asked to contribute toward the $30 million. The Upper New York Conference’s portion of this total is $1,274,588, a figure based on the number of proofs of claim filed with the bankruptcy court associated with Conference entities and churches.

The Survivor Trust Fund will be used to compensate persons alleged to have experienced abuse while in scouting. The BSA filed for bankruptcy as it faces more than 80,000 claims for alleged child sexual abuse over the last 80 years. United Methodist congregations sponsor more than 6,000 Boy Scout troops and Cub packs.

United Methodists participated in the bankruptcy mediation process with five goals.

1. Healing and support for survivors
2. Releases from claims related to sexual abuse for United Methodist congregations that chartered Boy Scout troops and Cub packs
3. Releases for all charter organizations
4. Preservation of congregations’ and annual conferences’ insurance
5. A fair and just financial settlement

The settlement agreement meets each goal, but the cornerstone of the United Methodist settlement was the healing and support for survivors.  Commenting on this announcement, Bishop Mark J. Webb said, “I’m grateful for the hard work done by the UM Ad Hoc Committee and the UMC Leadership Team to achieve this settlement. Our prayer is God will use this to bring some healing to survivors.” Bishop Webb continued, “We must also remain steadfast in our commitment to make all of our churches safe places for children, youth, and vulnerable adults.”

In addition to a financial contribution, United Methodists are committing to the following:

1. Train leaders to meet with and hear the experience and hopes of any survivor who participated in Scouting activities connected with a United Methodist congregation.
2. Review all Safe Sanctuaries/Ministry Safe policies and update as necessary.
3. Develop a series of articles about how to ensure safe youth programing.
4. Participate in a survivors’ justice and healing working group formed by survivors who filed claims.

The United Methodist Church does not tolerate sexual abuse of any kind and has consistently worked to keep young people safe. Most of the 80,000 claims occurred in the 1950s through the 1970s. Since that time, new practices and policies have been put in place by the BSA and UMC, which has dramatically decreased child sexual abuse. For United Methodists, only 1 percent of all claims alleged to have taken place in and through United Methodist Scouting programs occurred in the last 20 years. While that is a dramatic reduction, even one case is too many.

The efforts needed to keep the most vulnerable safe continue and the United Methodist Church will persist in its efforts to reduce the harm and increase the good. Working together, United Methodists can make a difference.