

Safe Sanctuaries Policy

Main Street United Methodist Church of Greenwood, SC

Introduction

The General Conference of The United Methodist Church has adopted a resolution aimed at reducing the risk of all forms of child abuse in the church. The Social Principles of the United Methodist Church state "...children must be protected from economic, physical, emotional, and sexual exploitation and abuse." (Book of Discipline, 2000). God calls us to make our churches safe places, protecting children and other vulnerable persons from all forms of exploitation and abuse. God calls us to create communities of faith where children and adults can participate in ministry in a safe and secure environment.

Thus, in covenant with all United Methodist congregations, we adopt this policy for the protection of children and the prevention of abuse in our church.

Purpose

Our congregation's purpose for establishing this Safe Sanctuary Policy and the accompanying procedures is to demonstrate our absolute and unwavering commitment to the physical safety, emotional integrity, and spiritual growth of all of our children, youth, teens, and adults.

Mission Statement

The mission of Main Street United Methodist Church is to be a community of disciples, calling all to Christ through love and example.

Statement of Covenant

Therefore as a Christian community of faith and a United Methodist congregation, we pledge to conduct the ministry of the gospel in ways that assure the safety and spiritual growth of all of our children, youth, and vulnerable persons as well as all workers. We will endeavor to

- follow reasonable safety measures in the selection and recruitment of workers;
- implement prudent operational procedures in all programs and events;
- educate all of our workers regarding the use of all appropriate policies, first aid, and discipline;
- have a clearly defined procedure for reporting a suspected incident of abuse that conforms to the requirements of state law;
- be prepared to assist the Bishop's office in responding to media inquiries if an incident occurs.

Review and Modification of Policies

This Safe Sanctuary Policy will need to be revised periodically to reflect the current circumstances and situations encompassed by the activities and ministries of Main Street United Methodist Church. The Staff-Parish Relations Committee (SPRC) is charged with the annual review of this policy and accompanying procedures. Revisions will be presented by the program staff to SPRC for approval. Annually, the Board of Stewards will meet to approve recommendations by SPRC. Periodic changes made at the Conference level pertaining to Safe Sanctuaries may be reflected in this local church document. These policies may be modified or withdrawn by Main Street United Methodist Church at any time. They are not intended to create a legally enforceable or binding promise or representation.

Throughout these documents, the following definitions apply:

Children – all persons 5th grade and younger

Youth – 6th – 12th grades or up through the age of 18

Vulnerable persons – persons older than 18 who may not be able to defend or protect themselves because of mental and/or physical disabilities

Workers – all volunteers and staff working with children, youth, or vulnerable persons

Child/Youth/Vulnerable Persons Abuse Prevention Policy

In order to protect our children, youth, and other vulnerable persons from the undue risk of verbal, physical, and sexual abuse, and other misconduct; and to protect our staff and volunteers who work with children and youth from false accusations, Main Street United Methodist Church has established the following policy. All church-sponsored ministries that work with children, youth, and other vulnerable persons must adhere to this policy.

1. All staff, clergy and volunteers who work with children, youth, and other vulnerable persons will be screened. The Senior Pastor will be responsible for receiving, reviewing, and maintaining under lock and key all background checks. The Staff/Parish Committee is responsible for evaluating clergy and paid employees. All volunteers must attend a training on the policy each year.

The primary screening procedure will be:

- a. Completion of the **Volunteer Application Form** (appendix a)
 - b. Completion of the **Volunteer Covenant Statement** (appendix b)
 - c. Signing of the **Criminal Background Statement and Background Check Authorization** (appendix c) so that a background check will be done and repeated every four years or as deemed necessary.
 - d. A personal interview
 - *All paid employees will have a personal interview with SPRC
 - *The church reserves the right to interview potential volunteers
 - e. Reference Checks – The church reserves the right to contact references listed on the application and screening form
 - f. The church will compare the sex offenders registration lists of South Carolina with the names of all employees and volunteers.
2. Adults or youth who have been convicted of any felony, including, but not limited to crimes involving the physical or sexual abuse of children, or who are listed on the South Carolina Sex Offender Registry, Department of Social Services Central Registry for Abuse & Neglect, or any other government registry pertaining to sexual misconduct or the abuse or neglect of children are not allowed to work with or interact with minors or vulnerable persons in any capacity.
 3. The Senior Pastor and the Staff/Parish Committee, as representatives of the Church, reserve the right to decline an application for service as a volunteer or paid staff member in these ministries. Volunteers and paid staff are expected to reflect appropriate conduct and behavior to provide positive role models and examples of Christian living in their capacity as leaders in ministry.

4. Volunteers must be members or regular attendees of Main Street United Methodist Church for a minimum of six months before being eligible to work as a scheduled teacher or worker with children, youth, and other vulnerable persons. Any volunteers or paid staff under the age of 18 must have adult supervision at all times. One volunteer must be at least five years older than supervised group.
5. Those working with children, youth, and other vulnerable persons in organized activities shall observe the “two-person rule” and/or the “open-view rule” at all times. The “two-person rule” requires a minimum of two unrelated persons be with children, youth, or other vulnerable persons at all times. If the “two-person rule” is not feasible, or practical, or the two workers are related, then the “open-view rule” must be observed. The “open-view rule” requires the interior of the occupied room to be visible to outside observers. An open door, a split door with the top half open, or an observation window or opening meets the requirements of the “open-view rule.” Off church property events require the presence of a minimum of two non-related adults.
6. All preschoolers are to be picked up from their activities by a parent or other adult designated in writing. First graders are taken by pre-arranged “buddy” to a parent after Sunday School. Second through fifth graders are released from Sunday School to meet parents at a pre-determined location. All parents of infants are offered a beeper during Sunday morning activities. All children under 2 will have an **Nursery Information Sheet** (appendix d) on file with the paid worker. All children 2 and older will have a completed **Medical Information** form (appendix e) and a **Permission Slip, Release and Medical Authorization** form (appendix f) on file.
7. Corporal punishment of any kind is absolutely forbidden and is considered abuse. A person should never discipline a child, youth, or vulnerable person in a church program by use of physical force such as spanking, hitting, or shaking. Also, a person should not scream in anger or threaten a child verbally or through bodily motions. If a child becomes a behavior problem, the staff person responsible for the activity will be contacted and will in turn contact the parents. Parents may be asked to attend the next activity with their child.
8. Any person or persons, including minors, who disrupt an event in a harmful manner or harm other individuals, will be asked to leave. In the case of minors, parents/guardians will be contacted to remove the child/youth. If the situation warrants, the person refuses to leave, or the parent(s) cannot be located, law enforcement officials may be contacted. A ministry area supervisor or pastor will also be notified.
9. In the event of an accusation of sexual misconduct, the accuser(s) will immediately contact the program staff member in charge of the activity, who in turn will contact the senior pastor. Procedures will then be followed according to the Conference office (appendix g), The staff member and Senior Pastor

are responsible completing the **Incident Reporting Form** (appendix h). In addition, South Carolina law requires that clergy report suspected cases of abuse or misconduct to the Department of Social Services and/or local law enforcement officials.

10. Informal contact refers to phone calls, letters, e-mails, other Internet communications, or face-to-face contact between an adult worker and a youth that is not connected to official church activities. The church recognizes that informal contact between worker and youth frequently occurs. However, workers should seek permission of parents before having informal contact with their youth. Parents are responsible for monitoring this informal contact.
11. Transportation to and from meetings and activities should be recognized as informal contact, and the guidelines for informal contact should be followed (see paragraph above).
12. Any over night trip requires a minimum of 2 adults. It may be necessary for leaders to share a room with children or youth in a hotel setting. In this case, leaders should sleep in separate beds from the children or youth. Any one leader should not stay in a room alone with a child unless they are related.
13. Although Boy Scout Troops and Cub Scout Packs are youth programs supported by Main Street United Methodist Church, they abide by the Youth Protection Plan, a policy of the Boy Scouts of America that has the same goals as this policy. Likewise, Girl Scout Troops, which utilize our facilities, abide by the Girl Scout plan, which has the same goals as this policy.
14. All persons who drive children, youth, or vulnerable persons on church-sponsored events shall be at least eighteen (18) years of age with a valid South Carolina driver's license and proof of insurance including liability and uninsured motorist coverage. Persons having a criminal history of DUI or DWI conviction within the past five years shall not act as a driver.
15. In the event of an injury, every effort will be made to contact a parent. A medical release form will be on file for all children and youth participating in church-sponsored events. An **Accident Reporting Form** (appendix i) will be completed in case of an injury by the staff member in charge and kept on file.
16. Parents should fill out an **Out of Town Trip Information** form (appendix j) before allowing any child or youth to leave on an overnight trip. All overnight trips will be documented by the staff member in charge (appendix k) and kept on file.