

# **Safe Sanctuary Policy**

Saint Paul United Methodist Church  
Greenville, South Carolina

The General Conference of the United Methodist Church, in April 1996, adopted a resolution aimed at reducing the risk of child sexual abuse in the church.

*Jesus, said, “Whoever welcomes [a] child...welcomes me” (Matthew 18:5). Children are our present and our future, our hope, our teachers, our inspiration. They are full participants in the life of the church and the realm of God.*

*Jesus also said, “If any of you put a stumbling block before one of these little ones...it would be better for you if a great millstone were fastened around your neck and you were drowned in the depth of the sea” (Matthew 18:6). Our Christian faith calls us to offer both hospitality and protection to the little ones, the children. The Social Principles of The United Methodist Church state that “children must be protected from economic, physical, emotional and sexual exploitation and abuse” (para.162C).*

*Tragically, churches have not always been safe places for children. Child sexual abuse, exploitation, and ritual abuse [“ritual abuse” refers to abusive acts committed as part of ceremonies or rites; ritual abusers are often related to cults, or pretend to be] occur in churches, both large and small, urban and rural. The problem cuts across all economic, cultural, and racial lines. It is real, and it appears to be increasing. Most annual conferences can cite specific incidents of child sexual abuse and exploitation within churches. Virtually every congregation has among its members adult survivors of early sexual trauma.*

*Such incidents are devastating to all who are involved: the child, the family, the local church and its leaders. Increasingly, churches are torn apart by the legal, emotional, and monetary consequences of litigation following allegations of abuse.*

*God calls us to make our churches safe places, protecting children and other vulnerable persons from sexual and ritual abuse. God calls us to create communities of faith where children and adults grow safe and strong. (From The Book of Resolutions of The United Methodist Church—2000, pp.180-181. Copyright 2000 by The United Methodist Publishing House. Used by permission.)*

Thus, in covenant with all United Methodist congregations, Saint Paul United Methodist Church adopts this policy for the prevention of child abuse in our church.

## **Purpose**

Our purpose for establishing this Child Abuse Prevention Policy and accompanying procedures is to demonstrate our total and unwavering commitment to the physical, emotional and spiritual safety of all our children, youth and vulnerable adults.

January 2019

## **Covenant Statement**

Saint Paul United Methodist Church hereby pledges to conduct the ministry of Jesus Christ in ways that assure the physical and emotional safety and spiritual growth of all of our children, youth and vulnerable adults as well as all of our workers with children, youth and vulnerable adults. We will follow reasonable safety measures when selecting and recruiting workers; we will implement appropriate operational procedures in all areas of programming and care; we will train our workers with children and youth on our procedures and policies; and we will have a clearly defined procedure for reporting a suspected incident of abuse consistent with South Carolina state law.

## **Definitions:**

Child- persons birth through 5th grade

Youth- persons 6th grade through graduate of high school or equivalent

Vulnerable Adult- Anyone aged 18 and over who is in need of community services because he/ she is unable to take care of himself/herself; is unable to protect himself/herself against significant harm or exploitation; or may have learning disability, mental illness, physical disability, visual and hearing impairment, HIV/AIDS or advanced age.

Parent/Guardian- parent or legal guardian

Approved Adult- volunteer or paid staff who have been through application and background check procedures and approved to work with children, youth and vulnerable adults

Church Leader- persons with position of authority over volunteers and or staff

## **Volunteer & Paid Staff Criteria**

### **Age**

Volunteers and paid staff who work with children and youth in any position of authority should be at least 21 years of age and at least 5 years older than the age of the persons they are working to serve. Exceptions may be made on a case by case basis for ages 18-21 to supervise youth or children, provided they are partnered with a person over the age of 25 who has met all other volunteer/staff criteria.

### **Membership**

Volunteers must be member or active participant of the church for at least 6 months. After one year of serving as an active participant, volunteers will be asked to consider membership or associate membership. Membership is not required of paid staff; however, suitability for the desired work will be determined through an interview process.

### **Prior Convictions**

Individuals who have been convicted of the following crimes may not work in any church-sponsored activity or program for preschoolers, children, youth or vulnerable adults: murder; rape; aggravated assault; felony drug charges; sexual abuse, sexual assault, inducing sexual conduct or sexual performance of a child; injury of a child; incest; indecency with a child; possession or promotion of child pornography; sale, distribution or

display of harmful material to a minor; employment harmful to children, or abandonment or endangering of a child.

Individuals convicted of DUI within the previous 5 years may not drive or transport children or youth during church activities.

If an individual has been charged of one of the crimes listed above, their volunteer or paid staff status shall be suspended until the matter is resolved.

## **Volunteer & Paid Staff Application Process**

### **Application**

Applicants must complete and sign an application and the related waivers giving permission to check references and background information.

### **Reference Checks**

Church leaders will check three references for each applicant. The references will be done by phone, mail, or in person. The reference form will be filled out by the person conducting the reference check.

### **Background Check**

Criminal background checks shall be made of all clergy, paid staff, and volunteers who have responsibility for children or youth (e.g. youth group leaders) and all other church employees, to the extent permitted by law, prior to employment, to determine current or historic child abuse or sexual misconduct, criminal records, violent or pedophilic behavior. All persons shall be rescreened with background checks through Trak1 every three years.

### **Interview**

All paid staff applicants must be interviewed for suitability for the work they desire to do. Volunteers may be interviewed at the discretion of the pastor and/or children/youth leader. Interviews will be conducted by the leader of the program in which the applicant will work, or by other persons designated by the program leader. A team of interviewers may be used. Church policy and guidelines should be discussed during the interview.

### **Child Abuse Survivor Applicants**

Adult survivors of childhood physical or sexual abuse need the love and acceptance of this church family. A person's experience with abuse and their recovery process may be pertinent to their suitability as youth and children's ministry workers. Applicants who are survivors of abuse should discuss this in confidence with the person who conducts the confidential interview. If an applicant is uncomfortable doing so, he/she may have the interview conducted by a pastor.

### **Confidentiality of Information**

The church will keep confidential all information received in the application process. Selection information will be marked as such and stored in a locked location with limited access afforded only to church staff and others with a need to know. The pastor and/or children/youth leader are responsible for the implementation of these policies as well as the maintenance of confidential records.

### **Verification and Acceptance of Policy**

Once approval status is confirmed and upon receipt of this policy, the volunteer or staff person will read, understand and agree to abide by all guidelines outlined within the policy. Acceptance of and commitment to the policy will be confirmed by signing the Participation Covenant Statement every year.

### **Renewal Application Process**

Volunteers and paid staff wishing to continue serving children and youth will renew their application every three years. This includes submitting an updated application and a background check will be completed through Trak1.

### **Staff & Volunteer Supervision Guidelines**

All meetings of children and/or youth affiliated with Saint Paul United Methodist Church will be governed by the following guidelines:

#### **Two Adult Rule**

Two approved, non-related adults shall be present *as much as possible* during any church sponsored activity or community groups of children or youth who meet at the church, including (but not limited to) classroom activities, activities away from the church facility, and when transporting children and youth. Supervisors/teachers will be assigned in teams of two or more to every gathering of children preschool age and younger. If the minimum of two approved adults is not possible, having approved adult "roamers" who will move in and out of activities and be available as needed is required. When feasible, both male and female approved adults will be present. If a group stays overnight at the church, or if a church sponsored group leaves the premises for an overnight trip, two or more approved adults must be present and must include at least one male and female if the group is mixed gender. See additional specifications for youth overnight outings in the "Outings Away from Church Property" section of this document.

#### **Doors and Windows**

All classroom and office doors will have a window or visibility from hallway or remain open while occupied. Windows will be kept free from adornment and kept locked at all times. Doors that do not have visibility from the outside will be replaced with doors with window when replacement is needed.

## **Restroom Procedure**

During organized church events, parents are encouraged to ensure that preschool-aged children do not attend the restroom unaccompanied. Parents and guardians are also encouraged to have children use the restroom with parental supervision prior to the start of the activity.

Parents and guardians are encouraged to have elementary-aged children remain in the sanctuary during the service, unless they accompany the child.

Volunteers and staff should not be alone with any child in the restroom with the door closed. Restroom doors shall be left open at all times unless a child is using the restroom by himself/herself. If a child is old enough to want privacy in the restroom, he/she is old enough to use the restroom by himself/herself. When taking a child to the restroom, the adult should remain outside the restroom door but within line of sight of other adults. If a child requires assistance, leave the door to the restroom and stall open at all times. Both children and adults who have assisted them should wash hands before leaving the restroom.

## **Check-in/Check-out Procedure**

All parents whose children are participating in Sunday School and/or Children's Worship shall observe the check-in/check-out procedure.

## **Classroom Discipline**

All volunteers and staff will use the following discipline measures:

1. If a child is behaving inappropriately, the teacher or worker will tell the child specifically what he/she is doing that is not acceptable and state what the expected behavior is, e.g., "We do not throw the blocks. We use blocks for building."
2. If this measure is not effective, the child will be guided to another activity.
3. If inappropriate behavior continues, the child may be placed at a table to work alone away from the other students.
4. If the child's disruptive behavior continues after these steps have been taken, a teacher will talk with the parent first. If needed notify the children/youth leader who will talk with the child and work with the child's parents.
5. **No physical punishment or verbal abuse, e.g., ridicule, are to be used at any time.** If isolating the child within the classroom or removal of the child from the room becomes necessary, the situation will be discussed with the child's parents or guardian as soon as possible.

## **Touch**

Physical affection should be appropriate to the age of the child or youth. Touching should be initiated by the child or youth and should be a response to the child's need for comforting. It should not be based upon the adult's emotional need.

Ideally, touching and affection should only be given when in the presence of other children's ministry or youth workers. It is much less likely that touches will be inappropriate or misconstrued as such when two approved adult workers are present, and

the touching is open to observation. This is especially important when diapering a baby or helping a young child change clothes or use the restroom (refer to Restroom Procedure).

Touching behavior should not give even the appearance of wrongdoing. As ministry workers our behavior must foster trust at all times; it should be above reproach. A child's preference not to be touched should be respected. Do not force affection upon a reluctant child. Church workers are responsible to protect children under their supervision from inappropriate touching by others.

Church workers must promptly discuss inappropriate touching or other questionable behavior by other workers with their ministry leader, staff member, or a pastor. Refer to "Response to Allegations of Abuse."

### **Observation & Visitation Policy**

This policy allows the parents of the children and youth served, chairpersons of children and youth, the clergy, and staff of the church the right to visit and observe the children's/youth activity, classroom, or church-sponsored program at any time, unannounced. Only approved volunteers and staff scheduled to work may be present during classroom/activity time.

### **Outside Access**

There must be access to a phone when groups are at or away from the church property. The church office or authorized church representative and parents will be given this number prior to the group's departure from church property.

### **Individual Counseling**

One-on-one interactions are sometimes necessary and appropriate, but care must be taken that they be conducted in an environment that provides visibility by other adults. Meeting must be conducted with the door open or in a room with a windowed door. Another approved adult must have knowledge of staff members' or the adult volunteers' whereabouts and with whom they are meeting. Children and youth receiving individual counseling should be told they are free to discuss any aspects of the counseling process with a parent or other adult, especially if they are uncomfortable about anything that occurs in counseling. All incidents of suspected abuse and neglect revealed during the session will be reported in accordance with the "Response to Allegations of Abuse" section of this policy.

### **Outings Away from Church Property**

All children and youth participating in out-of-town, off-campus, or over-night outings must have written consent and a medical release form. Notarized medical release and consent forms may be completed for a one-year period and must be renewed annually for church members and non-members who participate regularly. Non-members must complete a written consent and a medical release form for a one-time event. A copy of the consent and medical release form for each participant will be in possession of the approved adults during the outing; original copy will be filed in church office.

In no circumstance is one adult, other than the parent, to take a child or youth on an overnight outing alone. Neither shall a child or youth travel alone during a church-sponsored activity in a vehicle with only one adult unless it is their parent/legal guardian. Paid staff and volunteer leaders driving children or youth during a sanctioned church event must possess the applicable and current South Carolina State DMV license(s). Each passenger must wear a seatbelt when available during Advent off campus trips. Double buckling is not allowed.

On youth outings, there will be a 1:8 approved adult:youth supervision ratio observed. Female approved adults will supervise female youth in their sleeping quarters and male approved adults will supervise male youth. Married couples will not stay together but observe the female/female and male/male sleeping arrangements. With the exception of a parent/child combination, an adult and youth may not occupy the same bed or sleeping bag.

At the discretion of the approved adult supervisors, youth may be permitted occasional free time, wherein constant adult supervision is not required. Under these circumstances, a three-person rule shall apply, meaning that youth will stay together in pre-agreed groups of three. Youth and approved adults shall agree upon the duration and destination(s) during this time. Violation of these agreements by youth may forfeit their future ability to have occasional free time. If the primary outing activity involves swimming, a certified lifeguard must be present during such activities.

### **Gifts**

No staff or volunteers are to give gifts to individual children or young people without the prior knowledge of the parent(s) or responsible clergy. Gift giving should be done on a group basis to avoid the perception of buying loyalty or silence. Gifts should be modest and appropriate to the occasion.

### **Training**

Prior to working with children or youth, approved volunteers and staff must undergo Safe Sanctuary training. In addition, a summary of current child abuse statutes and reporting requirements for your legal jurisdiction are to be made available to all clergy, staff, volunteers, and Church Council members.

## **Response to Allegations of Abuse**

*As caring Christians, we are committed to protect and advocate for children/youth participating in the life of the church. The church is entrusted to provide an emotionally safe, spiritually grounded, healthy environment for children, youth, and adults in which they are protected from abuse. It is our legal and moral responsibility to report suspected abuse whenever it comes to our attention regardless of where that abuse takes place. We shall report suspected abuse to stop potentially existing abuse and to prevent further abuse. To report abuse is to witness to the world of the love and justice of God. Reporting abuse is a form of ministering to the needs of those crying out for help. If abuse occurs, it is our intention to act as an advocate for all affected persons, providing support, information, assistance and intervention. We seek to provide a supportive atmosphere, offering both objectivity and empathy as we seek to create a climate in which healing can take place.*

If abuse is suspected by, observed by or disclosed to a volunteer and/or paid staff member of the church, **that person shall report the incident immediately to the pastor or children/youth leader.**

The pastor or children/youth leader responding to an allegation of abuse shall be prepared to do the following:

1. Ensure the protection of and tend to the immediate needs of the victim (child, youth or vulnerable adult), as the situation requires.
2. Document in writing the circumstances of the incident. This documentation will be given to the pastor and/or Chair of the Staff Parish Committee.
3. Notify the following:
  - County Office of DSS. This is a legal requirement. (Note: Do not attempt an investigation. This should be left to professionals who are familiar with these cases.)
  - The chair of the Staff Parish Relations Committee; if the accused is the pastor, the chair of the Staff Parish Relations Committee will notify the District Superintendent.
    - A list of emergency numbers will be available to the staff at all times.
4. The pastor or children/youth leader will notify the parents/guardians of the victim and take whatever steps are necessary to assure the safety of the child/youth until the parent(s) arrive. It is important to emphasize that the proper authorities must be notified even if the parent(s) does not wish the incident to be reported. (Note: If one or both of the parents is the alleged abuser, contact the proper authorities listed above. Follow their advice about notification of the parents.)
5. After having reported the suspected abuse to the proper authorities, the incident is to be reported immediately to the church's attorney, the church's insurance company, and the district superintendent. The district superintendent will report the allegation to the bishop's office. Do not try to handle this without professional assistance. If the accused is a clergy (deacon or elder) member of an annual conference, local pastor, or diaconal



minister, provisions of Paragraph 359 and Paragraph 2702 of The 2012 Book of Discipline of The United Methodist Church must be followed.

6. If the accused is working in a volunteer or paid position with children or youth in the church, immediately, yet with dignity and respect for the sacred worth of the person, remove the accused from further involvement with children and/or youth.

7. Once the proper authorities have been contacted and the safety of the child or youth is secured, the pastor or other designated person may tell the accused that a report has been made. If the accused is a volunteer or paid staff of the church, that person shall be relieved temporarily of his or her duties until the investigation is finished. If the accused is a paid staff person of the church, arrangements should be made to either maintain or suspend his or her income until the allegations are cleared or substantiated.

8. Any contact with the media should be handled by a pre-determined spokesperson. Care will be taken to safeguard the privacy and confidentiality of all involved. The spokesperson should generally convey that the matter is under investigation and any comments made prior to the conclusion of the investigation would be premature.

9. A written report of the basic information shall be kept to ensure on-going ministry to, and advocacy for, victims and others involved. A form for this purpose shall be available in the church office. The report shall be brief and contain only factual information relevant to the situation. It shall be filed in a secure place in order to ensure confidentiality. It shall be written in ink or typed to prevent it from being changed. The church must also file a copy of the report with the bishop's office of the South Carolina Conference where it shall remain confidential.