

**SAFE SANCTUARIES  
CHILD AND YOUTH ABUSE PREVENTION POLICY  
ABINGDON UNITED METHODIST CHURCH (AUMC)**

**PURPOSE**

Our congregation's purpose for establishing this Child and Youth Abuse Prevention Policy and accompanying procedures is to demonstrate our Commitment to the physical, emotional, and spiritual safety and well-being of all of our children, youth, and persons with special needs. We understand that "abuse" includes, but is not limited to, physical abuse, emotional abuse, neglect, sexual abuse, and ritual abuse.

**POLICY**

As a Christian community of faith and a United Methodist Congregation, we pledge to conduct the ministry of the gospel in ways that assume the safety and spiritual growth of all of our children and youth, as well as the workers with the children and youth. We will follow reasonable measures in the selection and training of paid or volunteer workers, and we will be prepared to report any suspected incidence of abuse to the appropriate authorities, in accordance with state law. We will use the following procedures to implement our policy.

**PROCEDURES**

- **Minimum Age:** Volunteers and staff must be at least 18 years old and must be 4 years older than the age of the persons that they will be working to serve. Persons not meeting this requirement may not be left alone with children.
- **Six Month Rule:** All volunteers must have been active participants at AUMC for six months before they will be eligible to serve in the areas of children and youth ministries. Persons not meeting this minimum requirement may serve only as assistants with another adult. The Safe Sanctuaries Committee will consider exceptions to this rule.
- **Background Check:** Paid and volunteer workers shall undergo a background check. The report from the background check shall be reviewed by the Senior Pastor and placed in the employee's confidential personnel file maintained by the church. For volunteers, the report shall be reviewed by the Senior Pastor and placed in a private file, maintained by the church for these documents. These reports shall remain a church record for a period of five years following the last date of service for the employee or volunteer. In the event there are matters within the report of concern, the Senior Pastor shall report it to the Staff Parish Relations Committee for an employee and to the Children's Director for a volunteer. The Staff Parish Relations Committee and the Children's Director shall determine the appropriate action to take on the matter. For staff and volunteers, subsequent background checks shall be conducted at the discretion of the Staff Parish Relation Committee for employees and the Senior Pastor/and the Children's Director for volunteers.
- **Two-Adult Rule:** Two adults are to be utilized in all close-quarter programming with children and youth. This is a minimum that then falls in compliance with the adult/child ratios. Other ratios may apply in accordance with the Conference Policy. Where it is impossible to staff two adults in every room, we will have an additional adult serve as a floater with visual and physical access to all areas (requiring either doors to be open or having prominent windows in the doors).

- **Lodging:** Children or youth will room together without an adult. In situations where adults must room with youth or children in a hotel, cabin, tent, or other similar situation, there must be two adults. These adults must be the same sex as the children or youth. Adults cannot sleep in the same bed with youth or children unless they are the parent or guardian of that child.
- **Transportation for Church-Organized Events:** Drivers of church-owned or privately owned vehicles will always have more than one child and one adult in a vehicle. Exceptions to this rule are allowed only in emergency situations.
- **Release of Children:**
  - On-campus daytime and nighttime events including Sunday school, Children’s Church, Sunday and Wednesday night programs: All children 5<sup>th</sup> grade and younger must be picked up by a parent or guardian. Emergency cases will be determined on an as needed basis. We will release the children to brothers, sisters, or other designated persons with written permission from parents.
  - Off-campus events: All drivers taking children and youth to events shall adhere to the transportation rules. Drivers are not allowed to “drop” children off on the way back to the church from an off-campus event.
- **Open Door Rule:** All counseling sessions with children and youth shall take place in the offices with windows or the door shall remain open while the office is in use.
- **Policy Publication:** The Safe Sanctuary Policy will be posted in all areas of the church and included in the church’s publications.
- **Reporting Abuse:** Volunteers and staff who work with children under the age of 18 must report any type of suspected child abuse according to policy and state law.

Incidents of child abuse or reasonably suspected cases of abuse, whether allegedly perpetrated by individuals associated with the church or outside of the church, shall be reported to the Senior Pastor. In the event of the Senior Pastor’s absence or alleged involvement, allegations shall then be reported to the Associate Pastor.

- **Scheduled Events or Programs:** Two (2) adults must be present for scheduled events or programs.
- **Unsupervised children and youth:** Any person or group using, attending, or visiting any area of the church may not leave their children under the age of 12 unsupervised. Children may not be left in a room by themselves or allowed to roam the church campus. This includes the playground.
- **Training:** We will provide training opportunities to all paid or volunteer workers in areas such as, but not limited to, our safe sanctuaries policy, discipline policy, confidentiality policy, media response policy, first aid, and Cardio Pulmonary Resuscitation.
- **Safety:** Church staff and the Trustees shall monitor the conditions of the facilities for safety problems and conduct an annual review and inspection of the property.

- **Cyber Policy:**

*It is the responsibility of all adults who work with children or youth at AUMC to provide a caring, safe environment, making every effort to maintain a high ethical standard. With an ever-increasing array of electronic communication options, adults should give careful consideration to how they communicate with youth and children. Adults should keep in mind that electronic communication becomes a permanent part of the world-wide web. Electronic communication cannot be recalled once it has been sent, and can be quickly distributed to unintended recipients. This should be enough to engender a great deal of caution with anyone interacting electronically with children or youth. At a minimum, the following rules shall be followed:*

- a. Users of church computers shall limit the use to the visitation of sites which promote the mission and ministry of the church.
- b. Adults are not allowed to share sexually explicit sites with youth or children, and are not permitted to suggest or direct them to such sites.
- c. Adults are not permitted to enter chatrooms with youth or children from AUMC
- d. Adults are strongly advised to and shall exercise good judgment when interacting with children or youth on social media.
- e. When communicating electronically, adults are not permitted to make lewd or suggestive comments to a youth or child. Adults shall avoid comments that could be misunderstood as being lewd or suggestive.
- f. Adults shall not post or repost inappropriate material, or direct youth or children to such material.
- g. Adults shall report inappropriate material or communication from youth or children to their supervisor or Chair of Staff Parish Relations Committee.
- h. Passwords for church computers shall not be shared with any person not authorized to have that information.
- i. When children or youth are given access to church computers with the ability to access the internet, they are to be continuously supervised.
- j. No children or youth are to be identified or tagged in any photo on the church website or on the church facebook page. Photos of children and youth cannot be posted without written permission.
- k. All church electronic communication sent directly to a child or youth shall also be sent to an adult staff member or volunteer working with the youth.
- l. All electronic devices owned or sponsored by AUMC shall be password protected and, if used by children or youth, shall have the highest security software for internet exploration.

- m. No staff member or volunteer shall engage in any conduct or any activity, while not expressly set out herein, that is inconsistent with and violates the intent of the aforementioned guidelines.

This is a revision of the policy previously approved by the Church Council and is adopted to amend, supplement and carry out the rules set out therein.

Approval by Church Council: April 6, 2014

I, the undersigned staff member or volunteer, have been provided the Safe Sanctuaries Child and Youth Abuse Prevention Policy of Abingdon United Methodist Church. I have read it and agree to follow it in my work for the Church.

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Staff Member/Volunteer

Date: \_\_\_\_\_