



Main Street United Methodist Church

Greenwood, South Carolina

SAFE SANCTUARIES POLICY

In covenant with all United Methodist congregations, Main Street United Methodist Church, Greenwood, South Carolina, adopts this Safe Sanctuaries Policy for the prevention of the abuse of children, youth and vulnerable adults in our church:

I. Definitions

For purposes of this policy, the following words and phrases have the meanings ascribed in this section:

- A. **Child (or children)** – a person (or persons) who has not yet completed fifth grade.
- B. **Church** – Main Street United Methodist Church in Greenwood, South Carolina.
- C. **Legal guardian** – a person lawfully invested with the power, and charged with the duty, of taking care of a child, youth or vulnerable adult.
- D. **Vulnerable adult** – a person eighteen (18) years of age or older who may not be able to defend or protect himself or herself because of mental or physical disabilities.
- E. **Worker** – a paid staff member or volunteer of the church who works with children, youth or vulnerable adults on church property or at church-related events or activities.
- F. **Youth** – a person in sixth grade or higher until August 15 immediately following the person's graduation from high school; however, the term "youth" does not include any person who has attained twenty (20) years of age.

II. Purpose

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

III. Covenant Statement

Main Street United Methodist Church 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. We will have a clearly defined procedure for reporting a suspected incident of abuse consistent with South Carolina state law.

IV. Theological Reflection

We adopt this policy in accordance with the statement we as a congregation make at each baptism: we will "nurture children and youth in the Christian faith and life and include them in our care." With this policy, we renew our baptismal pledge to "live according to the example of Christ" and

surround children and youth with a “community of love and forgiveness, that they may grow in their trust of God, and be thus confirmed and strengthened in the way that leads to life eternal.”
(Baptismal Covenant II, United Methodist Book of Worship).

V. Volunteer and Staff Recruitment and Selection Guidelines

- A. **Church affiliation** – Each volunteer who works with children, youth and vulnerable adults is encouraged to be an active participant at the church for at least six (6) months.
- B. **Volunteers working with children, youth and vulnerable adults** – A satisfactory background check must be completed before a volunteer works with children, youth or vulnerable adults in the church or at a church-related event or activity.
- C. **Application** – Each prospective church staff member and volunteer must complete and sign an application form and the related waivers giving permission to the church to check references and background information.
- D. **Reference checks** – Church leaders may request up to three (3) references for each prospective church staff member and volunteer. A reference check may be performed by phone, mail, electronic communications or in person.
- E. **Clergy and staff background checks** – A background check must be made of each clergy and paid staff member.
- F. **Sex offender registry checks** – The sex offender registration lists of South Carolina must be compared periodically with the names of all church staff members and volunteers.
- G. **Prior convictions** – An individual who has been convicted of physical or sexual abuse or neglect or who is listed on the South Carolina Sex Offender Registry, the 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 may not work in any church-sponsored activity or program for children, youth or vulnerable adults. An individual who has been convicted of DUI may not drive persons of any age for a period of no less than five (5) years following the DUI conviction.
- H. **Interview** – Each applicant may be interviewed for suitability for the work he or she desires to do. Any such interview must be conducted by the leader of the program in which the applicant will work or by persons designated by the program leader to conduct the interview. A team of interviewers may be used. Church policy and guidelines should be discussed during the interview.
- I. **Confidentiality of information** – The church will keep confidential all information received in the volunteer and staff selection process. Selection information will be stored in a locked location with limited access only by church staff and others with a need to know.
- J. **Required forms and signatures** – In addition to staff application and reference forms, each applicant must sign an “Authorization and Request for Criminal Background Check” form.

VI. Supervision Guidelines

- A. **Two-adult rule** – Except as otherwise authorized in this paragraph, two (2) nonrelated adults must be present during on-campus classroom activities involving children, youth and vulnerable adults. If this is not possible, at least one (1) adult must be assigned as a “rover” to walk the halls and regularly look in on teachers and the groups they are leading. Whenever possible, teachers will be assigned in teams of two (2) or more per Sunday School

hour to every class of children, youth and vulnerable adults. For youth overnight outings, see specifications prescribed in Section VI.G. of this policy.

- B. **Nursery procedure** – A legal guardian of each child in the church nursery must observe check-in and checkout procedures.
- C. **Open-view policy** – Further protection for children, youth and vulnerable adults requires that an open-view policy be followed. The legal guardian of a child, youth or vulnerable adult participating in a church classroom, program or activity, as well as clergy and administrative and professional staff of the church, have the right to visit unannounced and observe the classroom, program or activity at any time.
- D. **Outside access** – The group leader of children or youth must be accessible by phone when a group is at or away from the church facility. The church office or an authorized church representative must be given this number before a group's departure from church property.
- E. **Doors and windows** – Except as otherwise provided in this paragraph, all classroom and office doors must have a window or visibility from the hallway. Windows must be kept free from obstruction, and exterior windows must be locked at all times. At any time a group of children or youth or a group including a vulnerable adult is meeting in a room without visibility from the hallway, the two-adult rule prescribed in paragraph A above must be followed strictly. Whenever a door without visibility from the outside is replaced, the replacement door must have a window.
- F. **Individual counseling** – One-on-one interactions with children, youth and vulnerable adults are sometimes necessary and appropriate, but care must be taken that they be conducted in an environment that provides visibility by other adults. Whenever a worker is meeting individually with a child, youth or vulnerable adult, the worker must notify another adult of his or her whereabouts and with whom he or she is meeting.
- G. **Outings away from church property** – A legal guardian of each child or youth participating in an out-of-town or overnight outing must sign a written consent form and medical release form, both of which may be completed for a one-year period but must be renewed annually. On youth overnight outings, a 1-to-7 adult-to-youth supervision ratio must be observed. Female adults must supervise female youth in their sleeping quarters, and male adults must supervise male youth. Married couples must observe the female/female and male/male sleeping arrangements. With the exception of a legal guardian, an adult may not occupy the same bed or sleeping bag occupied by a child, youth or vulnerable adult. Unless an adult is the legal guardian of a child, youth or vulnerable adult, the adult may not: take the child, youth or vulnerable adult on an out-of-town or overnight outing alone; or share sleeping quarters with the child, youth or vulnerable adult alone.
- H. **Transportation** – Whenever the church bus is used to transport children, youth or vulnerable adults, at least one (1) other adult in addition to the driver must be present on the bus.
- I. **Gifts** – Volunteers and paid staff who work with children, youth and vulnerable adults may not give gifts to individual children, youth or vulnerable adults. Because gift-giving can be considered a form of buying loyalty or silence, gift-giving should be done on a group basis and only on special occasions. Gifts should be modest and appropriate to the occasion.
- J. **Training** – Before working with children, youth or vulnerable adults, a worker must undergo Safe Sanctuaries training. The Safe Sanctuaries policy will be evaluated no less than every three (3) years by the church trustees, and training must be offered at least annually to persons working with children, youth and vulnerable adults. The training will be extended to Church Council members, the Staff-Parish Relations Committee (SPRC), church trustees and paid staff.

- K. **Verification of reading of policy statement** – Before working with children, youth and vulnerable adults, each volunteer and paid staff member must read and sign a statement confirming that he or she has been provided and read this Safe Sanctuaries Policy.

VII. Response by Church Workers to Allegations of Abuse

If a suspected incident of abuse or neglect at the church or a church-sponsored activity is revealed to a volunteer or paid staff person, the following steps must be taken:

- A. The adult in charge of the activity must:
 - a. Ensure the safety of the child, youth or vulnerable adult and tend to his or her immediate needs, as the situation dictates.
 - b. Inform the pastor.
 - c. Complete an incident report.
- B. The pastor must:
 - a. Contact the family of the involved child, youth or vulnerable adult.
 - b. Immediately remove the accused from further involvement with children, youth and vulnerable adults, with dignity and respect for the sacred worth of that person.
 - c. Inform the district superintendent and the church's insurance company.
 - d. Determine, in consultation with the district superintendent, what to tell key church leaders and the congregation and devise a plan to help the church move forward.
 - e. Consult with the conference communications coordinator for assistance in dealing with media inquiries and preparing statements.
 - f. Act as the only point of contact for any media inquiries or designate one other person to do so. All other church staff and volunteers must refer any media requests to the pastor or his or her designee.
- C. The person who initially reported the suspected incident of abuse or neglect, or to whom the allegation was revealed, must call the appropriate local law enforcement agency.

If the pastor is suspected or accused of sexual misconduct or abuse, the following steps must be taken:

- D. The safety of the victim of the alleged misconduct or abuse must be ensured and his or her immediate needs tended to, as the situation dictates.
- E. The person who initially reported the alleged misconduct or abuse, or to whom the allegation was revealed, must:
 - a. Inform the Staff-Parish Relations Committee chairperson.
 - b. In cases involving alleged abuse, call the appropriate local law enforcement agency.
- F. The SPRC chairperson must inform the district superintendent.

G. The district superintendent will inform the bishop and, in consultation with the SPRC chairperson, they will decide whether the pastor will be removed from the pulpit until the investigation is completed and resolved.

H. The bishop may activate the Conference Response Team to help the church with next steps.

VIII. Conclusion

In all of our ministries with children, youth and vulnerable adults, this congregation is committed to demonstrating the love of Jesus Christ so that each child, youth and vulnerable adult will be “surrounded by steadfast love...established in the faith, and confirmed and strengthened in the way that leads to life eternal.” (*Baptismal Covenant II, United Methodist Book of Worship*)

IX. Certification of Receipt

I certify that I have been given a copy of this Safe Sanctuaries Policy of Main Street United Methodist Church in Greenwood, South Carolina.

Name: _____ Position: _____
(please print) (please print)

Signature: _____ Date: _____