Model Safe Sanctuaries Policy

North Alabama Annual Conference

# Instructions for Use

This model Safe Sanctuaries policy is provided as a resource for churches and ministries in the North Alabama Conference in adopting a child protection (Safe Sanctuaries) policy that is compliant with the best practices for policies as described in the Conference policy. Churches/ministries for whom this policy is appropriate to their context can simply fill out the appropriate fields in this model policy and have it approved.

In general, churches for whom this policy is appropriate:

* Have children/youth programming that is generally limited to weekly events at the church facility (i.e. Sunday School, UMYF, etc.)
* Do not regularly transport children/youth or have overnight events
* Do not have a school-like setting (daycare, preschool, mothers’ day out, etc.)
* Do not have substantial ministries specifically for vulnerable adults

In using this model policy, it is the church’s responsibility to:

* **Ensure that their policy is appropriate to their context.** While this model policy may be beneficial as a starting point for churches with more complex Safe Sanctuaries needs, it will likely need to be modified to align with the church’s context. If churches have questions or need assistance updating the policy to be appropriate to their context, they can contact their district office (contact information is available at [www.umcna.org/districts](http://www.umcna.org/districts)).
* **Have the model policy approved by the appropriate body in the church (usually the administrative board).** Like any policy in the church, this model policy must be approved by the appropriate governing body, not just an individual.
* **Facilitate and maintain records about training of staff and volunteers.** The Conference has an online training available at training.umcna.org that is based on this model policy and fulfills the training requirements set forth in it. Following completion of the online training, participants will receive a certificate which the church should keep on file. If the church has modified this model policy, they should consult with a district trainer to determine what training is appropriate.

Additional resources and information about Safe Sanctuaries can be found at [www.umcna.org/safesanctuaries](http://www.umcna.org/safesanctuaries).

Safe Sanctuaries Policy

\_\_\_\_\_ United Methodist Church

**Introduction**

\_\_\_\_\_ United Methodist Church (the “Church”) seeks to create a safe environment for children and youth in which opportunities for abuse are minimized by the provision of proper enlistment and supervision of those persons working with them. This document contains theological foundations, definitions of child abuse, policies and procedures related to prevention, response, and reporting.

This policy is applicable to events during which the Church directly provides for the care of children and youth.

**Foundations**

*Scriptural Foundation:*

“Then Jesus took a little child and put her among them; and taking her in his arms, he said to them, ‘Whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me, and whoever welcomes me welcomes not me but the one who sent me.’” (paraphrase of Mark 9:36- 37) 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 Commitment in Baptism:*

Our goal is to maintain a safe, secure, loving place where children may grow and where those who care for them may administer to their needs in responsible ways.

*Our Task:*

The 1996 General Conference approved a resolution that called upon local churches and annual conferences to institute policies and procedures to reduce the risk of child sexual abuse in our churches and church-related activities. We as a Church endeavor to create an environment where all forms of abuse, not just sexual abuse, is prevented and where justice is sought for abuse that we learn of which occurs outside of the Church.

**Definitions**

* *Child (also ‘youth’ or ‘minor’):* a person under 18 years of age
* *Volunteer:* a person not employed by the Church who serves in a leadership role over minors under the Church’s care
* *Staff:* a person employed by the Church who serves in a leadership role over minors under the Church’s care
* *Leader:* an individual, whether volunteer or staff, who is responsible for a group of minors or vulnerable adults
* *Abuse:* harm or threatened harm to a minor’s health or welfare by a person responsible for the minor’s health or welfare or by a person in a position of trust, which harm occurs or is threatened through non-accidental physical or mental injury or sexual abuse. Abuse may include, but is not limited to, sexual abuse, physical abuse, neglect, and verbal abuse.

**Screening and Training**

* All volunteers and staff working directly with children or youth shall be required to complete a background check to include a Social Security trace, State of Alabama criminal check, and national (multi-jurisdictional) criminal check, provided that a sex offender registry check is included individually or as a component of one of these checks.
* Background checks shall be valid for three (3) years from the date on which they are completed.
* Volunteers and staff shall be required to complete training on the local church’s Safe Sanctuaries policy prior to serving, and should complete refresher training at least every three (3) years thereafter or within six (6) months of a change to the Church’s Safe Sanctuaries policy.
* At least once per year, there should be an opportunity for volunteers and staff responsible for the care and supervision of minors to complete Safe Sanctuaries training led by a district trainer or another individual authorized by the North Alabama Conference.
* “Quick-trains” may be offered to allow new volunteers and staff to begin serving prior to the next scheduled training using materials provided during the last training presented by a staff member or volunteer at the church who is not qualified as a trainer, provided that that individual participated in the most recent training and the new staff member or volunteer is required to participate in the next scheduled training.

**Supervision Requirements**

* Volunteers and staff serving as leaders shall be not less than eighteen (18) years of age.
* Volunteers and staff serving as leaders shall be no less than five (5) years older than the oldest member of the group for which they are responsible, provided that paid staff who do not meet this requirement may serve as a leader if they are at least three (3) years older than the oldest member of the group and supervising minors is included in their job description as approved by the staff/pastor-parish relations committee.
* Volunteers and staff should be required to be active in the congregation for not less than six (6) months prior to serving, defined as attending weekly worship or other church-wide events at least twice per month on average during that period. This requirement shall not apply to staff where supervising minors is included in their job description as approved by the staff/pastor-parish relations committee.
* At no time shall a leader person be responsible for more than ten (10) minors, notwithstanding other requirements of the policy.
* Two non-related and non-cohabitating adults shall be required to be present any time children or youth meet, provided that the following may be permitted where it is not possible or practical to have two non-related and non-cohabitating adults:
  + “Floaters” responsible for supervising multiple rooms on a single hallway may be allowed provided that the following requirements are met:
    - The individual serving as a floater is qualified as a leader for all age groups which they are supervising
    - Serving as a floater is the individual’s only responsibility
    - The floater is able to see the entirety of rooms for which they are responsible from the hallway
    - The floater has immediate access to enter all rooms for which they are responsible
    - All doors to rooms for which the floater is responsible are visible from any point on the hallway (i.e. no rooms are around corners or on different floors)
  + Caravans, wherein multiple vehicles with only one adult per vehicle remain within sight of each other at all times and start and stop travel simultaneously, may be used.
  + “Least-related” adults may serve together provided that spouses may never serve together and count as two adults.

**Transportation/Overnight Events**

* Drivers shall be required to be qualified as leaders.
* Drivers should be required to complete a motor vehicle record check and provide current proof of insurance.
* Chaperones shall be required to be of the same gender as the children or youth being chaperoned.
* Adults shall not share a bed or be alone in a room with any child, including their own.
* Overnight accommodations should be selected in accordance with this policy. Where possible, hotels with doors opening to an interior hallway should be selected over motels with doors opening to the outside.
* For all overnight events and any non-overnight events that will take place away from church property, the leader should obtain medical/liability release forms, contact information for parents/guardians, and other relevant information. Copies of this information should be kept in the church office, with the leader, and in the vehicle in which the minor is riding.

**Reporting Procedures**

Volunteers and staff of the Church will practice and advocate voluntary compliance with the Alabama statute on reporting of known or suspected abuse/neglect of children. Allegations of suspected abuse/neglect will be reported to the Department of Human Resources or local law enforcement.

Nothing in this policy is intended to call upon a pastor to violate the confidentiality of confession or clergy counseling relationships. Nonetheless, clergy are considered mandatory reporters under state law and must report known or suspected abuse unless disclosed within the confidentiality of confession or clergy relationships. However, pastors are permitted by law, and are encouraged, to report known or suspected cases of child abuse or neglect even if the pastor learns of the abuse or neglect in the course of a confidential communication. If possible, the pastor should alert a person of the pastor’s obligation and commitment so that the person, during a counseling session or other confidential communication setting, may choose not to share the information about the child abuse or neglect with the pastor.

The individual who observes or suspects abuse is responsible for making a report to law enforcement or the county Department of Human Resources. Immediate notification of the report must also be made to the volunteer or staff member’s supervisor. It shall be the pastor’s responsibility (or chair of the staff/pastor-parish relations committee in the event the pastor is implicated) to notify the district superintendent.

**Response Procedures**

A quick, compassionate and unified response to an alleged incident of child abuse is expected. All allegations will be taken seriously. Church volunteers and staff are not to undertake an investigation of an alleged incident. Reporting procedures outlined above in section 5 are to be followed. However, in all cases of reported or observed abuse in a children’s activity, the entire staff of that activity shall be at the service of all official investigating agencies after the procedures for reporting listed above are followed.

The district superintendent and/or his/her designee are the only person/(s) authorized to make statements to representatives of the media. All requests for statements should be directed to the Conference Director of Communication. Training in how to handle media requests shall be a regular part of Conference staff training. A spirit of cooperation in helping the media find the “official spokesperson” is crucial.

If the allegation concerns activities or persons outside any relationship to a Church-related event or activity, it is the responsibility of the leader in charge of the Church activity to follow reporting procedures outlined above.

ADOPTED the \_\_\_\_\_ day of \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_, 20\_\_\_\_\_