

Safe Sanctuary Policy

2018-2019



Why we have this policy in place:

Biblical Mandate:

- **Mark 9:36-37 (CEB)** Jesus reached for a little child, placed him among the Twelve, and embraced him; Then he said, "Whoever welcomes one of these children in my name welcomes me; and whoever welcomes me isn't actually welcoming me but rather the one who sent me."
- **Matthew 18: 6 (CEB)** As for whoever causes these little ones who believe in me to trip and fall into sin, it would be better for them to have a huge stone hung around their necks and be drowned in the bottom of the lake.

Part of the baptism covenant we make with each child:

- As a parent or congregation, we proclaim, we will nurture these children in Christ's holy church, that by our teaching and example they may be guided to accept God's grace for themselves, to profess their faith openly, and to lead a Christian Life.

Mandated from the General Conference of 1996 that each United Methodist Church have a policy:

- In 1996 the General Conference set a mandate and call to action for a written policy. The Conference approved a resolution in 2000 that called upon each United Methodist congregation and Annual Conference to take specific steps to protect children and vulnerable persons. This includes writing and implementing a child protection policy.

Each church and annual conference is to tailor a policy to fit their ministries and circumstances. This mandate was reaffirmed again in 2000, 2004, 2008, and 2012 in the United Methodist Book of Resolutions.

*** For the protection of volunteers in case of false allegations of abuse:**

- Having a trained, screened and trustworthy staff of volunteers and workers who respond correctly and positively to allegations speaks highly of the church and may avoid getting involved in litigation.

*** Our insurance company will not cover the church without a policy in place:**

- Tragically, churches are not always a safe place for children and vulnerable persons. Child sexual abuse, exploitation, and ritual abuse occur in churches, large and small, urban and rural. Our insurance company requires a safe sanctuary policy be in effect. Our church could be torn apart by the legal, emotional, and monetary consequences of litigation following allegations of abuse. (This statement is a partial quotation from SAFE SANCTUARIES: Reducing the Risk of Abuse in the Church for Children and Youth by Joy Thornburg Melton copyright 2008 Discipleship Resources.)

1. Purpose:

It is the purpose and intent of Weaver First United Methodist Church to provide a safe and secure environment to teach and care for the children, youth and vulnerable persons of our faith family.

2. Goal:

Our goal is to protect children, youth and vulnerable persons from any type of inappropriate sexual behavior, molestation, abuse or neglect by employees or volunteers of the church and to protect employees and volunteers from false accusations.

3. Definitions:

Employee – Anyone who is paid by the church on a full-time or part-time basis and is responsible for activities involving congregational ministry to minors or vulnerable persons.

Volunteer – Anyone who is not paid by the church, and is serving in any position involving the supervision or custody of children, youth or vulnerable persons. Examples: Nursery,

childcare, preschool, grade school, middle school, high school and college workers, bus drivers, teachers, chaperones, VBS helpers, and others designated by the church.

Child/minor – Anyone under the age of 19 years, by definition of age of majority in the State of Alabama.

Vulnerable Person – Any person, regardless of age, whose behavior indicates that he or she is mentally incapable of adequately caring for himself or herself and his or her interests without adverse consequences to himself or herself or others, or who because of physical or mental impairment, is unable to protect himself or herself from abuse, neglect, exploitation, sexual abuse, or emotional abuse by others. (Definition taken from the “Adult Protective Services Act of 1976” Ala. Code (1975) 38-9-2(1), but expanded to include vulnerable children.

Caregiver – An individual who has responsibility for the care of a Vulnerable Person as a result of a family relationship, or who has assumed that responsibility voluntarily, by contract, or as a result of the ties of friendship.

Child sexual abuse – The National Resource Center on Child Sexual Abuse defines it as “any sexual activity with a child...whether in the home by a caretaker, in a daycare situation, in any organized ministry, whether at the main facility (church) or away, or in any other setting, including on the street by a person unknown to the child”. The abuser may be an adult, an adolescent, or another child. Child sexual abuse can be violent or non-violent. It is criminal behavior that involves children...in sexual behavior. Child sexual abuse can involve fondling; penetration of the oral, genital and anal areas; intercourse; and forcible rape. Other forms of abuse can include verbal comments, any exposure to pornographic materials, inappropriate internet activity, obscene phone calls, exhibitionism, or allowing children to witness sexual activity. Note, a 18 year old or older can be charged with sexual abuse against another who is less than 16 years old, or any person, who is four or more years older than the victim, can be charged with a sexual offense.

Physical abuse – Abuse in which a person deliberately and intentionally causes bodily harm to a child or vulnerable person.

Emotional abuse – Abuse in which a person exposes a child or vulnerable person to spoken and/or unspoken violence or emotional cruelty.

Ritual abuse – Abuse in which physical, sexual or psychological violations of a child or vulnerable person are inflicted regularly, intentionally and in a stylized way by a person or persons responsible for the child’s or vulnerable person’s welfare.

Exploitation – The expenditure, diminution, or use of the property, assets or resources of a Vulnerable Person without the express voluntary consent of that person or his or her legally-authorized representative.

Neglect – Abuse in which a person endangers a child's or vulnerable person's health, safety or welfare through negligence.

4. Policies and Procedures:

The policies and procedures set forth below will apply to all people who give supervision or have custody of children, youth or vulnerable persons or who have the opportunity to have contact with them in church facilities or church sponsored activities whether clergy, paid staff, or volunteer. This policy will address four areas that are critical for the protection of children, youth, vulnerable persons, our employees, volunteers and our church.

a. Selection Process:

Current or new employee

1. Receive a written job description.
2. Complete an application form with 2 unrelated reference checks.
3. Complete a background check consent form.
4. Receive appropriate clearances of all checks to work with children, youth and vulnerable persons.
5. Undergo personal interview.
6. Attend Safe Sanctuary Training.
7. Renew background check annually.

Regular, Occasional, and Last-Minute volunteers

1. All volunteers working with children, youth or vulnerable persons must be a member or regular attendee and active with the church for at least six months unless we have vetted the individual by a process including an interview with the Safe Sanctuary Team and completing a successful background check.
Complete a background check consent form.
2. Receive appropriate clearances of all checks to work with children youth and vulnerable persons.
3. Attend Safe Sanctuary Training Annually.
4. Renew background check every 3 years.

Note: All records, forms and reports of both employees and volunteers will become part of a confidential file that will be kept by the Safe Sanctuary Team at the local church.

b. Protection Policy:

Age Requirement – Church leaders, both employee and volunteers, must be at least 19 years of age.

Two Adult Rule – Two non-related adults must always be present in groups of children, youth, or vulnerable persons. Floaters may be used when needed.

Five Year Rule – All persons working with minors must be at least five years older than the age group they are leading/supervising.

Six Month Rule – Any volunteer working with children, youth or vulnerable persons must be a member or regular attendee with the church for at least six months ~~unless we~~ have vetted the individual by a process including an interview with the Safe Sanctuary Team and completing a successful background check.

Adult to Child Ratios:

Birth – 18 months:	1:3
18 – 30 months:	1:3
2 ½ - 4 years:	1:5
4 – 5 years:	1:5
5 – 8 years:	1:7
8 years and up:	1:7

Windows/Open Doors – All rooms where children, youth or vulnerable persons are meeting will have windows (in doors or walls), half doors or open doors for all teaching/learning activities. Doors to rooms will never be locked when children, youth or vulnerable persons are present.

Leader Requirements:

- * More than 5 years older than oldest student.
- * Student helpers can assist if at least 5 years older than the class and at least 12 years old.
- * Two non-related and non-cohabitating adults in every room. Use a floater if needed.
- * Active at church at least 6 months.

c. Overnight Activities:

Chaperones – Adults must be same gender as those being chaperoned. Additionally, adult to child ratios must be maintained. (See section 4b)

Hotel Setting – No adults in the bed with a minor or vulnerable person. Adults will never be alone in a room with a minor or vulnerable person. If possible, select hotels with rooms opening to inside hallway.

Bunkroom Setting – At least 2 same gender adults may sleep in a large room with multiple bunk beds.

Off-site trips information exchange:

A parent must receive contact information to include:

1. Start/stop times.
2. Location of event.
3. Program content.
4. Lodging information.
5. Covenant rules expected of their child.

Staff/volunteer/drivers must receive:

1. All contact information from parents.
2. Signed parent/guardian permission/liability form.
3. Health/emergency information.

d. Transportation:

1. Drivers:
 - a. - Will have license and insurance information on file with church.
 - b. - Are required to complete Safe Sanctuary training.
 - c. Are required to complete background check including Motor Vehicles Record Check.
 - d. Insure copies of passenger list/records are kept in vehicle, and a copy must be provided to church office.
 - e. Two adult rule required in vehicles.
2. Everyone must wear seat belts.
3. Front seat passengers must weigh 85 pounds or greater.
4. If a charter bus is rented ask the coach company if a background check is conducted on their drivers. If not, look for another charter bus company.
5. Never let youth drive from church to off-site locations. Either plan to meet at location of transport with adult drivers.

e. Outside Groups Meeting in Your Church Facilities:

1. It is recommended that the local board of trustees/Safe Sanctuary Team require that all outside organizations review, and agree to comply with all of the church's safe sanctuary policy.
2. They should provide their own background checks and train their own leadership.
3. Documentation should be kept on file in the church office.

5. Reporting Procedures:

Alabama State law encourages voluntary reporting of child abuse and abuse of vulnerable persons in faith-based ministry settings. Pastors and clergy are mandatory reporters of suspected abuse or neglect in the case of children, youth, or vulnerable persons. In keeping with Christian beliefs that neither children nor vulnerable persons should be abused and neglected, Weaver First United Methodist Church will practice and advocate voluntary compliance with the Alabama State law suggesting reporting of suspected abuse/neglect of all minors and vulnerable persons.

- A. Allegations of suspected abuse/neglect will be reported to the pastor. The pastor will notify local law enforcement, insurance agent, and District Superintendent.
- B. A written abuse report is to be placed with authorities within 24 hours.
- C. Media contact will be referred to the District Superintendent, who will speak on behalf of the church. The District Superintendent will also notify the communication department of the North Alabama Conference, and the Bishop.
- D. If the Pastor is accused of abuse, the SPRC Chairperson should directly report the incident to the District Superintendent.

6. Response Procedures:

- A. A quick, compassionate and unified response to alleged incidents of child vulnerable persons abuse is expected.
- B. All allegations will be taken seriously, with grace shown to ALL parties.
- C. The Pastor will yield to the District Superintendent. Church personnel are not to undertake an investigation of the incident. However, in all cases of reported or observed abuse in a children's or vulnerable person activity, all those present should be at the service of official investigation agencies.
- D. The church will keep a Christian perspective on how they portray the incident to the community. The church will let the law decide the truth, show respect to both parties, and as a community of faith, vow to keep these matters private.

- E. The victim is **never responsible** for causing the abuse and the victim is **never to be blamed** for the abuse. The victim is **never capable of consent to abusive behavior**, either legally or morally. **Sexual abuse is always wrong** and is solely the responsibility of the abuser.

7. Recommended Reading for Safe Sanctuaries:

1. Safe Sanctuaries, Reducing the Risk of Abuse in the Church for Children and Youth by Joy Thornburg Melton
2. Safe Sanctuaries for Ministers, Best Practices and Ethical Decisions by Joy Thornburg Melton
3. Safe Sanctuaries, the Church Responds to Abuse, Neglect, and Exploitation of Older Adults by Joy Thornburg Melton forward by Richard H. Gentzler, Jr., DMin.
4. Safe Sanctuaries in a Virtual World by Joy Thornburg Melton and Michelle L. Foster

8. Safe Sanctuary Team

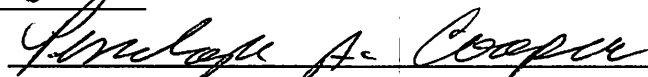
The Safe Sanctuary Team reports to the Property (Trustee) Chair. The policy must be approved by the Church Council.

- John DiMartino (Safe Sanctuary Trainer/Leader)
- Dana Bearden (Children's Ministry Leader)
- Krystal Railey (Youth Leader)
- Nisa Besta (Nursery Director)
- Heather Headley (Children's Sunday School Teacher)
- Evelyn Thompson (Food Teams Coordinator/IN Council Chair)
- Corey Railey (Council Chair/Youth Ministry Leader)

EFFECTIVE DATE: Approved by the Church Council Date: 9-20-18

Pastor's Signature: 

Date: 9-20-18

Reviewer's Signature: 

Date: 9-20-18