

Safe Sanctuary Policies

St. Mark's United Methodist Church

Last update- October 2014

A. Statements and Definitions

1. Purpose: St. Marks United Methodist Church seeks to establish reasonable procedures to reduce the risk of physical, emotional and sexual abuse of children, youth and vulnerable adults as they participate in church ministries, and to protect staff and volunteers from false allegations of misconduct.

2. Biblical Foundation:

“And they were bringing children to Him, that he might touch them, and the disciples rebuked them. But when Jesus saw it He was indignant, and said to them, “Let the children come to me, do not hinder them; for to such belongs the kingdom of God. Truly, I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child shall not enter it.” And He took them in His arms and blessed them, laying His hands upon them”.

Mark 10:13-16

The Bible is foundational to our understanding upon which all policies, procedures and ministries must stand. Our goal in response to this Biblical mandate is to maintain a safe, secure and loving place where children, youth and vulnerable adults may grow.

3. Signs, Symptoms and Definitions of Abuse: For more information see the Virginia State Law by going to www.chesterfield.gov, “Social Services-Child Protective Services, section 63, 2-100 of Code of VA.

4. Definitions of Terms: For the purposes of St. Mark's programs, children are babies to elementary school aged, from 0 to 11 years of age. Youth are middle school to high school aged, from 11 to 18 years of age, vulnerable adults are 18 years of age and incapacitated or are 60 and over or persons who are 18 years of age or older whose vulnerability is related to impaired physical and/or mental health and/or physical disability. (UMC Book of Discipline and Code of Virginia). Parents are welcome to stay with their own child at anytime, in any location.

Policies

1. Two Adults Rule: Leaders are assigned in teams of two or more for all children, youth or vulnerable adult activities. These two leaders must be unrelated adults age 18 or older. In addition, they should be at least 5 years older than the oldest participant. If it is not possible for two adults to be present, the activity must take place in a public, open view area.

2. Six month Rule: At least one of the two, unrelated adults should have been a member or constituent of St. Mark's UMC for at least 6 months.

3. Participant to Supervisor Ratios: As set forth by the United Methodist Conference. Adequate supervision should be provided at all times with the goal being:

- One adult to 3 children, zero to twelve months of age, infants
- One adult to 4 children, twelve to twenty-four months of age, toddlers
- One adult to 6 children, twenty-four to thirty-six months of age, preschool
- One adult to 8 children, four to eleven years of age, elementary school
- One adult to 10 youth and vulnerable adults, eleven years of age to adult, middle & high school and adults

The specific needs of individuals or physical limitations of event space may require a change to these guidelines.

4. No Child Left Unattended: In order to ensure the safety of children, youth and vulnerable adults, none of these should be left or found alone in the church building or property. Children should either be in the company of their parents, or with two volunteer adults abiding by this policy. Members should help guide children, youth and vulnerable adults back to their parents or teachers and cheerfully remind those of this policy.

5. Screening Procedures:

Paid church staff are employed by St. Mark's UMC in either full time or part time capacity. Screening procedures for paid staff:

- Collect general information
- Perform criminal background check
- Verify references

Scheduled volunteers are persons organized in advance. Screening procedures for scheduled volunteers:

- Volunteer must read Safe Sanctuary Policy
- Volunteer must sign Volunteer Agreement and/or have Agreement on file
- Check online sex offender list

For assistants/helpers/volunteers that are in place that day:

- Give copy of Safe Sanctuary Policy
- Give copy of Volunteer Agreement

6. Open access: Parents and paid church staff are welcome in classrooms at any time. All church classroom doors have windows. Volunteers may not take kids away privately where they cannot be seen by other adults, even during outdoor events or on trips/overnights. Brief observations of volunteer leaders should occur by paid church staff so that volunteers may be monitored. When possible, doors should remain open to allow access/view. If volunteers must meet alone with youth, they should do so in public areas, with doors open to view.

7. Visiting the Bathrooms: Adults should NEVER enter bathroom that is not their gender. If a volunteer must be in a bathroom, they can stand in the open doorway, out of view of stalls. Volunteer should ask parents to take children to bathroom BEFORE they enter a room to begin a program. Separate facilities for adults and children should be provided whenever possible. Adults should respect the privacy of the child in the bathroom. In the **Nursery**, care givers should show respect for the privacy of the child in the bathroom, yet remain in view of other adults when assisting child in bathroom or changing a child. Volunteers can stand in doorway of classroom to watch older children walk down hall to bathrooms on their own

8. Overnight Trips and Transporting: Obtain the following information from parents: permission, medical/allergy, waiver for transporting, contact information, emergency contact, limitations and behavior expected. Minimum of one male chaperone and one female chaperone required on overnights, unless participants are all the same gender. Adults who transport must have valid driver's license, follow all VA state laws, keep doors locked while in motion, ensure all persons wear proper safety belts/seats and not be under influence of or consume tobacco, drugs, or alcohol. No children should be left in vehicle unattended. Any other transporting of children or youth need documented permission from parents (ie. letter or text). No automobile will contain only one adult and one child, youth or vulnerable adult.

9. Dismissing children: Constant supervision is required until children/youth/vulnerable adults are picked up by an approved person, excepting those youth who can drive. No child should leave room/activity on their own. There are no visitors in nursery. Appropriate two person adult supervision should be maintained before and after an event until all children, youth and vulnerable adults are in the proper custody.

10. First Aid kits, AED and rescue medications: First aid kits are located throughout the church in labeled rooms. AED are located at church in Fellowship Hall and CLC areas. Volunteers can be responsible for the rescue medications of children, youth and vulnerable adults during programs/events. Please notify paid church staff of any first aid situations.

11. Website & Cyber safety: Our church will avoid posting children's names and ages on websites. We will post pictures of children only after the class/event has occurred. On Facebook, photos should never be tagged with names. A general media/photo release will appear in the bulletins each Sunday. For specific events, a media/photo release should be signed by parents to allow consent.

12. Code of Conduct: All volunteers and children, youth and vulnerable adults are expected to behave appropriately, including but not limited to the following: no weapons, no alcohol or tobacco, no drugs, no cursing or profanity, no verbal abuse or intimidation, and no gambling. For behavior management use: re-directing not discipline-if necessary, ask parent to return for child, please talk with parent and paid staff about child behavior issues, no removing child from classroom and creating a 1-on-1 situation.

Procedures

1. Policies Being Broken: If a volunteer is failing to follow policy, other church members and staff should remind the volunteer of Safe sanctuary policy and report incident to paid church staff. If this person fails to follow policy on a routine, unnecessary or unjustified basis, possible removal of volunteer will be considered by paid church staff. Staff and volunteers should endeavor to minimize instances of inadvertent failures to follow policy. Emergency situations may also cause inadvertent failure to follow policy.

2. Training and Review: Staff, volunteers, and others working with children will be strongly encouraged to attend a training session when offered. In addition, this document will be reviewed and/or updated by the Safe Sanctuaries committee as needed.

3. Related Information: the following websites were helpful in the research of this document: VAUMC.org, VADSS.org, DBHDS, as well as the following on-line documents: Code of VA and the UMC Book of Discipline.

Reporting

1. Required Reporters: Anyone can make an anonymous report of suspected child abuse. Mandated reporters are teachers, doctors, law enforcement, therapists, daycare workers, church workers and others responsible for the care of children.

Hotline numbers are available 24 hours a day/7 days a week:

Children/Youth: **(800) 552-7096** Adults: (800) 83-ADULT

Chesterfield/Colonial Heights Department of Social Services: (804) 748-1100

2. Should there be allegations of child abuse at St. Mark's United Methodist church, follow the **Reporting Procedures** below:

- If needed, emergency medical aid should be provided.
- Treat **any** allegation of abuse seriously; do not ignore the issues in the hope it will go away.
- Immediately notify the Pastor or Associate Pastor of the substance of the allegations.
- All adults involved will document all observations, comments, actions, relevant facts & procedures. Opinions or feelings are not useful in this report. Use dates and times. Turn allegation over to Pastors. Pray for the church and all persons affected by the allegation. Observe confidentiality for both the alleged victim and the accused until the investigation is complete.
- The Pastor or Associate Pastor will then determine when and if:
 - **The alleged victim's parents/guardians should be notified**
 - **The Virginia Department of Social Services should be notified (which can be done anonymously). VDSS will help you determine the next steps and/or will conduct an investigation if warranted.**
 - **Legal counsel should be sought.**
 - **The District Superintendent should be notified.**
 - **Notification to the church insurance carrier.**
- Do not confront the accused with the allegation. If the accused has assigned church duties, that person should be relieved temporarily of his or her duties until the investigation is concluded. If the person is a paid employee, the question of continuing or suspending compensation during the investigation should be addressed.
- The pastors will extend whatever pastoral care and resources are necessary, **but under no circumstances should the local pastor investigate the allegation.** In providing pastoral care to the alleged victim and the alleged victim's family or to the accused or the accused's family, the pastors should, under no circumstances, be drawn into a discussion of the truth or falsity of the allegation. Do not assign blame or take any steps that involve establishing or refuting the allegation.
- It is appropriate to show care and comfort for the alleged victim. In fact, this should be the pastoral objective from the moment the allegation is received or otherwise made known.
- Observe confidentiality for both the alleged victim and the accused until the investigation is complete.
- The Bishop and/or his/her designee are the only persons authorized to make statements to the media. All requests for statements should be directed to the Director of Communications.

Volunteer Agreement

After reviewing the foregoing document, please sign, date, detach and return this portion to indicate that you have read, understood and accept the Safe Sanctuary Policy of St. Marks United Methodist Church.

Name

SSN

Driver's license number/state

Address

City & Zip

Previous names/places of residence

Phone Numbers

I have read and understand the Safe Sanctuary Policy of St. Marks United Methodist Church. I agree to abide by those policies and procedures. I have no convictions for child abuse or expunctions of such convictions. I authorize and release any references to St. Marks United Methodist Church with any information (including opinions) that they may have regarding my work with children and/or youth.

Sign & Date

Current & prior church memberships/dates

Current & prior experience with children/youth

Current & prior backgrounds checks/dates

I offer to donate the amount of my Background check

For Office Use Only:

Copy Sent to Person

Background Check

Training