

Safe Sanctuary Policies for St. Mark's Ministries only St. Mark's United Methodist Church

Last update- June 2018

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 all workers, including 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 to love Christ.

3. **Signs, Symptoms and Definitions of Abuse:** For the most up-to-date information, see the Virginia Department of Social Services Child & Family Service manual at www.dss.virginia.gov.

4. **Definitions of Terms:** For the purposes of St. Mark's programs, children are babies to elementary school aged, in our Nursery and Children's Ministry and Family events. Youth are middle school to high school aged, in our Student Ministries. Vulnerable adults are persons who are 18 years of age or older whose vulnerability is related to impaired physical and/or mental health and/or physical disability or limitation, in our Adult Ministry and events.

B. Policies

1. **Two Adults Rule:** Volunteers and staff are assigned in teams of two or more for all children, youth or vulnerable adult activities. At least two must be unrelated adults age 18 or older. In addition, at least one adult should be at least 5 years older than the oldest participant, if children or youth are involved. If it is not possible for two adults to be present, the activity must take place in an open view area, with witnesses. Parents are welcome to stay with their own child at any time, in any location.

2. **Six month Rule:** At least one of the volunteers or staff should have been attending St. Mark's UMC regularly for at least 6 months.

3. **Participant to Volunteer 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, usually twenty-four to thirty-six months of age, preschooler
- One adult to 8 children, usually four to eleven years of age, elementary school grades

-One adult to 10 youth and vulnerable adults, usually eleven years of age to adult, middle & high school grades and vulnerable adults
The specific needs of individuals or physical limitations of event space may require a change to these guidelines.

4. No Child Left Unsupervised: In order to ensure the safety of children, youth and vulnerable adults, none of these should be unsupervised in the church building or property. They should either be in the company of their parents, caregivers, or with volunteers or staff abiding by this policy. Volunteers and staff should help guide unsupervised children, youth and vulnerable adults back to their parents, caregivers or volunteers and remind those of this policy.

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

6. First Aid kits, AED and rescue medications: First aid kits are located throughout the church in labeled rooms. AED devices are located at church in Fellowship Hall and first & second floors of the CLC. Volunteers or staff can be responsible for the rescue medications of children, youth and vulnerable adults during programs/events. Please notify paid staff of any first aid situations. The church strives to offer CPR/AED training as often as possible.

7. Volunteer Code of Conduct: All volunteers and staff 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 staff about child behavior issues, no removing a child from a classroom that creates a 1-on-1 situation.

8. Photos, Website & Cyber safety: Our church staff will avoid posting children's names and ages on websites. We will post pictures of children only after the class/event has occurred. We will use easily-identified individual child photos with permission/ Media Waiver. On Facebook, photos should never be "tagged" by staff with names. A general media/photo release will appear in the bulletins each Sunday. For specific events or "out-of-house use", a media/photo release should be signed by parents to allow consent. "In house use" of pictures/video may be: bulletins, Connections, worship slides, etc. while "out-of-house use" of pictures/video may be: Facebook, cards, brochures, website, etc. Volunteers are asked not to "tag" photos from the church website and to seek parent approval before "sharing" any pictures of other kids.

9. Transporting: Obtain the following information from parents: a permission form, medical/allergy information, waiver for transporting, contact information, emergency contact, limitations and behavior expected. 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 child, youth or vulnerable adult should be left in a vehicle unattended. When transporting one child, youth or vulnerable adult by one adult a letter or text from

caregiver with specific permission. It must be confirmed with parents if children or youth are allowed/eligible to ride in the front passenger seat.

C. Screening

On the recommendation of the VA United Methodist Conference, St. Mark's Church uses ScreeningOne.com for volunteer background checks. Each volunteer must submit their name and email to the church staff person in that ministry area. An email with a secure login will be sent to the volunteer. The volunteer then submits all their private information and the background check is completed. The volunteer can check the box to receive a copy of their completed background check. ScreeningOne background checks will cost \$19.90 and the volunteer can check a box to receive a copy of their cleared background check. Volunteers may also submit copies of other background checks (Chesterfield County teachers and/or coaches) that have been completed within the last two years.

Regularly serving volunteers are persons organized in advance and serve frequently:

- Volunteer must read & sign Safe Sanctuary Policy
- Volunteer must register for background check with ScreeningOne.com

Helpers/assistant volunteers that are in place that day or will serve only one time:

- Volunteer must read & sign Safe Sanctuary Policy
- Wear name badge

Disqualifying Offenses:

- Zero tolerance in cases of violence or sexual misconduct towards children or youth or adults with special needs.
- Convicted of a felony or misdemeanor in offenses against:
 - Children, youth or families.
 - Public Order, Safety or Decency.
 - Property, to the extent that these offenses relate to threats, harm or violence.
 - Online solicitation of a minor.
 - Involving any controlled substance.
 - Public Health, Safety & Morals, as relates to illegal possession or use of weapons.

D. Policies by Ministries

Nursery

1. **Bathrooms & Diaper Changing:** Caregivers 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. When necessary for older children in childcare, workers can stand in doorway of classroom to watch older children walk down hall to bathrooms on their own.

2. **Checking In Children:** Parents will fill out the check-in form for each child they are signing-in, taking care to note any restrictions, allergies, alerts, etc. Pagers will be given to parent/ guardian to allow for easy access when & if needed. Nursery staff and volunteers should label all belongings dropped off with each child.

3. **Dismissing Children:** Constant supervision is required until children are picked up by an approved person. No child should leave room/activity on their own. Appropriate two person adult supervision should be maintained before and after an event until all children are in the proper custody. Care should always be taken to dismiss each child to the appropriate adult. There are no visitors in Nursery.

4. **Food & Snacks:** If a snack or food is provided for children, a clean area and/or another food option must be provided for those children with allergies and notification given to the parents/guardians. Staff must supervise eating / snacks at all times.

Children

1. **Visiting the Bathrooms:** Adults should NEVER enter bathroom that is not their gender. If a volunteer or staff must be in a bathroom, they can stand in the open doorway. Volunteers and staff 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. Volunteers or staff can stand in doorway of classroom to watch older children walk down hall to bathrooms on their own

2. **Dismissing children:** Parents drop older children (K-5th grades) off in Kids Worship room and Preschool children off in their classroom. At this time parents tell leaders if someone other than themselves are picking up their children. Constant supervision is required until children are picked up by an approved person. No child should leave room/activity on their own. Appropriate two person adult supervision should be maintained before and after an event until all children are in the proper custody.

3. **Food & Snacks:** Unless the snack or food is an important part of the program or lesson, is should not be provided for children. If a snack or food is provided for children, a clean area and/or another food option must be provided for those children with allergies and notification given to the parents/guardians. Adult volunteers or staff must supervise this area.

Students

1. **Overnight Off-Site:** Obtain the following information from parents: permission to attend, medical/allergy, waiver for transporting, contact information, emergency contact, limitations and behavior expected. Volunteers may not take kids away privately where they cannot be seen by other adults, even during outdoor events or on trips/overnights.

2. **Dismissing youth:** Supervision is required until youth are dismissed to a caregiver, excepting those youth who can drive.

VBS/Camps/Events

1. **VBS and the Bathrooms:** Adults should NEVER enter bathroom that is not their gender. Separate facilities for adults and children will be specified during vacation bible school week. Adults should respect the privacy of the child in the bathroom.

2. **Overnight Off-Site:** 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. Volunteers may not take kids away privately where they cannot be seen by other adults, even during outdoor events or on trips/overnights. At least two of the same gender chaperones should be sleeping in the room with the participants.

E. Procedures

1. **Policies Being Broken:** If a volunteer or staff is failing to follow policy, other church members should remind the volunteer of Safe Sanctuary policy and report incident to paid staff. If this person fails to follow policy on a routine, unnecessary or unjustified

basis, removal of volunteer will be coordinated by paid church staff and SPRC. Volunteers and staff should endeavor to minimize instances of inadvertent failures to follow policy.

2. **Training and Review:** Volunteers and staff will complete volunteer job-specific and sexual abuse awareness training sessions when offered. In addition, this document will be reviewed and/or updated by a Safe Sanctuaries Task Force every five years, or as needed. Church offers CPR/AED training, sexual abuse awareness training and job specific trainings.
3. **Church Property Safety Procedures:** Safety training and details provided by church Safety Team. Staff and volunteers must follow all posted Safety procedures in all areas of the church property, including evacuation and lock down. The Safety Team strives to keep the congregation and staff up to date on church safety procedures, plans and drills.

F. Reporting

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

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

Children/Youth: **(800) 552-7096** Adults: (800) 832-3858

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, volunteers or staff must follow the **Reporting Procedures** below (from the VA United Methodist Conference Office):

- If needed, emergency medical aid should be provided.
- Treat **any** allegation of abuse seriously; do not ignore the issues in the hope they will go away.
- Immediately notify the Police, then a church staff member or the 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 how to proceed within church policies.
- 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.
- 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.

Safe Sanctuary Agreement for St. Mark's Ministries Confirmation

After reviewing the foregoing document, please complete and return this portion to indicate that you have read, understood and accept the Safe Sanctuary Policy of St. Marks United Methodist Church and agree to a background check by ScreeningOne.com

Full Legal Name (first, middle, last) _____

Phone Numbers _____

Email Contact _____

Consent to Background Search

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 disqualifying offenses or criminal record. I authorize and release my ScreeningOne background check and 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 _____

- **An email will be sent to you with a secure log in for ScreeningOne.com**

References:

Current & prior church memberships/dates _____

Current & prior experience with children/youth _____

Current & prior backgrounds checks/dates _____

(Can you obtain copies of previous background checks completed within two years?)

For Office Use Only: