



Safe Sanctuary Policy

"Now it is required that those who have been given a trust must prove faithful." 1 Corinthians 4:2

Purpose

As caring Christians, we are committed to protect and advocate for children, youth, and vulnerable adults participating in the life of the church. The church is entrusted to provide a safe, spiritually grounded, healthy environment for children, youth, and vulnerable adults in which they are protected from abuse. St. John's United Methodist Church (St John's) has established this Safe Sanctuary Policy and accompanying procedures for the purpose of demonstrating our total and unwavering commitment to the physical, emotional and spiritual safety of all our children, youth, and vulnerable adults.

Covenant Statement

St John's hereby pledges to conduct the ministry of Jesus Christ in ways that address the physical and emotional safety and spiritual growth of all our children, youth and vulnerable adults as well as all of our workers with children, youth, and vulnerable adults. We will establish emergency procedures regarding medical and fire. We will follow reasonable safety measures when selecting and recruiting workers and volunteers. We will train our paid staff and volunteers who work with children, youth and vulnerable adults on our policies and procedures; and we will have a clearly defined procedure for reporting a suspected incident of abuse consistent with the laws of the State of South Carolina.

Theological Reflection

We adopt this policy in accordance with the statement that we as a congregation make at each Baptism; that 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, p.96).

Definitions

Volunteers - Unpaid persons serving in ministry with children, youth, and vulnerable adults.

Children - Persons from birth through fifth grade.

Nursery - Limited to birth through age 4.

Youth - Persons from Sixth Grade through age 17.

Adults - Persons a minimum of age 18.

Paid Staff - Personnel on the payroll of St John's.

Ministry Leader - Person whose position gives directions and supervises volunteers and/or staff.

Parent - Parent or legal guardian.

Certified - Paid staff or volunteers who have been trained and approved to be ministry leaders for children, youth, and vulnerable adult programs.

Vulnerable Adult - Anyone aged 18 and over who is in need of community services because he/ she is unable to take care of himself/herself; is unable to protect himself/herself against significant harm or exploitation; or may have learning disability, mental illness, physical disability, visual and hearing impairment, HIV/AIDS, or advanced age.

Unrelated Adult Leaders - Leaders who are not members of each other's immediate family, including married couples.

Approved Adult Leader - Leader coming from a non-church related group using St. John's facility.

Organized Activity - Event formally organized by the church.

Staff/Volunteer Recruitment and Selection

Age

In recruiting and hiring volunteers and paid staff to work with children and youth, in St. John's organized activities, they must be at least 18 years of age and at least five years older than the age of the children or youth they are working to serve. St. John's values the presence of youth volunteers. Youth volunteers may assist where there is less than a 5-year age difference, and may serve as a third person in the room after a two unrelated adults per room requirement has been fulfilled.

Rule for Certification of Volunteers

St. John's will only certify volunteers for children, youth or adult ministries in the church after they have: (1) been participating in the activity for a probationary period of a minimum two months, (2) expressed a desire for certification, and (3) completed basic training requirements. This time of interaction between ministry leaders and the volunteer allows leaders to better evaluate the suitability of a volunteer for ministry work. Volunteers who have been in place and working for an extensive period of time at St. John's UMC are grandfathered in, considering time previously served as satisfaction to the above-mentioned probationary period.

All volunteers are expected to complete the Safe Sanctuary Covenant Statement.

Application

Applicants for paid staff positions must complete and sign an employment application and the related waivers giving permission to check references and background information. Both paid staff and volunteers must complete an Authorization and Request for Criminal Background Check and an Application Questionnaire as part of the application process. Any person who will drive children, youth, or vulnerable adults on St. John's-sponsored trips must submit to a driver's license check and a DMV check.

Reference Checks

The Director of Staff and Planning will oversee the reference check process.

Background Checks

Criminal background checks shall be made of all paid staff and volunteers, to the extent permitted by law, prior to employment, to determine, among other things, current or historic child abuse or sexual misconduct, criminal records, violent or pedophilic behavior.

Rechecks will be done at five-year intervals.

Prior Convictions

Individuals who have been convicted of physical or sexual abuse or neglect will not work in any church sponsored activity involving children, youth or vulnerable adults.

Confidentiality of Information

The church will keep confidential all information received in the selection process. Selection information will be marked as such and stored in a locked location with limited access, controlled by the Director of Staff and Planning.

Training

A Record of Safe Sanctuary Training will be kept for each volunteer that will list the date of training, type of training received, and instructor.

Use of St. John's Facilities by Other Organizations

Other organizations invited to use St. John's facility for children, youth or vulnerable adult activities (i.e. Boy Scouts, Girl Scouts, etc.) must provide a copy of their policy to the St. John's business office for review by St. John's Trustees, the authorizing body which grants permission to use the facility.

After policy review, Trustees will determine which policy shall be observed. The other organization's policy must be compatible with and complementary to St. John's policy. The requesting organization will also receive copies of applicable St. John's policies and will be expected to follow those policies if they have no formal policy of their own

Staff/Volunteer Supervision

The following basic procedures will guide the day-to-day children, youth, and vulnerable adult ministries at St. John's. Adherence to these procedures will demonstrate to members and visitors alike St. John's commitment to being a safe and holy place where children, youth, and vulnerable adults can grow in their faith.

Two Unrelated Adult Rule

Two certified unrelated adults must be present at all times during on-site and off-site organized St. John's activities involving children, youth, and vulnerable adults. Teachers will be assigned in teams of two or more per Sunday school hour to every class of children or youth. Concerted effort will be made to recruit sufficient numbers of volunteer teachers/leaders to permit such team teaching. A Roamer will be present during Preschool/MDO and the Nursery and Sunday School hour, to look in on the all the rooms where children are present, including the Youth Sunday School rooms. Volunteers from the community who assist at Vacation Bible School will have certified leaders present. These VBS volunteers will be considered another adult in the room helping these certified leaders.

Sign In/Sign Out

All children in the Nursery will be required to be signed in and out of activities by their parent or guardian or by another individual only with advance written permission from the parent(s) or guardian.

Emergency Response Plans

First Aid kits are available in the main kitchen. Procedures for emergency response plans are posted in each room.

Open-Access Policy

St. John's policy is that the paid staff, ministry leaders, and the parents of the children and youth served have the right to visit and observe the children's/youth activity, classroom, or church-sponsored program at any time, unannounced.

Line-of-Sight

Understanding that there is safety in numbers, one adult can be in contact with multiple youth (6th-12th grade) so long as they are in line of sight of other adults. Any one-to-one interaction should be conducted in sight of another unrelated adult.

Doors and Windows

Every room specifically designated for activities involving children and youth shall have a door with a window in it or have a half-door. Counseling rooms shall have windows on the doors which must be unobstructed.

Restroom Policy

Because restroom entry doors do not have windows, we have established these procedures: Parents and guardians are encouraged to have children use the restroom with parental supervision prior to the start of any church activity. Volunteers and staff will not be alone with any child in a restroom with the entry door closed. The door can be held open with a trashcan, or another adult can be located close by. If the child is old enough to not need bathroom assistance, an adult will stand outside the door, within line of sight of the other adult.

Emergency Contact

There must be access to a parent/guardians' phone, cell phone or pager when groups are at or away from the church facility in organized events. The church office or authorized church representative will be given this number prior to the group's departure from the church facility. Parents will always be given advance notice and full information regarding the organized events in which their children will be participating. For organized activities held away from the church facility, a Permission to Participate form is required.

Individual Interactions

One-on-one interactions are sometimes necessary. Care must be taken that ministry leaders conduct these interactions in an environment that provides visibility. In a one-on-one session, another adult is to have knowledge of the staff member's whereabouts and with whom they are meeting. Line-of-sight rule applies. Children and youth involved should be advised they are free to discuss any aspects of the session with a parent or other adult, especially if they are uncomfortable about anything that occurs in the interaction. All incidents of suspected abuse or neglect revealed during the session will be reported in accordance with Section III of this policy.

Appropriate Behavior

All children, youth, and leaders are expected to behave in a Christ-like manner during all on and off campus official activities sponsored by St. John's. Youth and children with reading and writing skills will sign a Safe Sanctuary Covenant Statement. Paid staff and volunteers will be trained in appropriate behaviors as well.

Inappropriate Behavior

Any questionable or inappropriate behavior directed towards children or youth during St. John's organized events and activities must be reported immediately to the supervisor or ministry leader of the event or activity. If the inappropriate behavior involves the supervisor or the ministry leader, the report should be made to the Director of Staff and Planning or the Senior Minister or the PPRC.

Inappropriate behavior includes but is not limited to the following examples:

- Sexually oriented humor or language.
- Derogatory or demeaning comments regarding a participant's race, gender, or sexual orientation.
- Unwelcome or undesired physical contact.
- Inappropriate comments about a participant's clothing or appearance.
- Inappropriate comments about a participant's mental or physical capabilities.
- Inappropriate requests for social engagements in situations where there is an employee, teaching, mentor, coach, or colleague relationship between the persons involved.
- Ridicule.

Organized Activities Away From Church Property

All children or youth participating in organized activities held out-of-town, off-campus, or overnight must have a completed Permission to Participate written consent form. All participants, including vulnerable adults and leaders, must have a current medical release form. No adult, other than the parent or guardian, may take a child or children on an overnight outing alone. Paid staff and volunteer leaders driving children or youth during an organized St. John's activity must possess the applicable, current, and valid South Carolina State DMV license(s). Seat belts must be used. On youth overnight organized outings, there will be a maximum ratio of no more than 8 youth for each certified adult. Female certified adults will supervise female youth and male certified adults will supervise male youth in their sleeping quarters. Married couples will observe the female/female and male/male sleeping arrangements. With the exception of a parent/child, or sister/sister, or brother/brother combination, no adult and youth will occupy the same bed or sleeping bag. At the discretion of the certified adult leader, youth may be permitted occasional free time wherein constant adult supervision is not required. Under these circumstances, a three-person or more rule shall apply, meaning that youth will stay together in pre-agreed groups of three or more. Youth and adult leaders shall agree upon the duration and destination(s). Violation of these agreements may result in forfeiture of future occasional free time.

Discipline

No physical punishment, verbal abuse or other inappropriate behavior will be used to discipline children, youth, or vulnerable adults at any time. All certified paid staff and volunteers will adhere to this mandate.

Gifts

No paid staff or volunteers are to give gifts to individual children or youth without the prior knowledge of the parent(s). Because gift giving can be a form of buying loyalty or silence, gift giving should be done on a group basis or for special occasions only. Gifts should not be elaborate but should be modest and appropriate to the occasion.

Training

All paid staff and volunteers must undergo Safe Sanctuary training prior to working with children, youth, or vulnerable adults. There will also be periodic mandatory refresher training. Paid staff who supervise children, youth, or vulnerable adults must maintain current certification in basic First Aid and basic CPR. New employees working with children, youth, or vulnerable adults will obtain this certification within 90 days of the start of their employment. Volunteers are encouraged, but not required, to receive First Aid and CPR training if they frequently accompany children, youth, or vulnerable adults on activities.

All volunteers who work with children, youth, or vulnerable adults will attend an orientation training session prior to beginning to serve as volunteers.

- Training sessions will be held at least quarterly.
- At the training session all volunteers will be given a copy of the Safe Sanctuary policy.
- Every volunteer will receive an informational packet including definitions of abuse, signs of abuse, and appropriate behaviors for adults working with children, youth, or vulnerable adults.
- All pertinent documents required, including application, consent to criminal background check, and Covenant Statement, will be completed.

CPR/First Aid

Annual First Aid/CPR training is encouraged and will be made available for all who work with children, youth, and vulnerable adults. The Volunteer Coordinator, Director of Children's Ministries, and Director of Youth Ministries will be required to complete First Aid/CPR training and remain certified. Each church-sponsored event held on- or off-campus will have at least one adult present who is certified in First Aid and CPR. First Aid kits will be available in St. John's first floor kitchen and on the church bus.

Records

A record will be kept listing the names of volunteers who work with children, youth, and vulnerable adults and will include the area in which each is volunteering, and the dates. This information will be kept on the Volunteer Work Record and will be maintained by the Director of Staff and Planning.

Response by church workers to allegations of abuse

In this Safe Sanctuary environment it is our legal and moral responsibility to report suspected abuse whenever it comes to our attention, regardless of where that abuse takes place. To report abuse is to witness to the world of the love and justice of God. Reporting abuse is a form of ministering to the needs of those crying out for help. If abuse occurs, it is our intention to act as an advocate for all affected persons, providing support, information and assistance. We seek to provide a supportive atmosphere, offering both objectivity and empathy, as we seek to create a climate in which healing can take place.

If abuse is suspected by, observed by, or disclosed to a volunteer and/or paid staff member of the church, that person shall report the incident immediately to the Director of Staff and Planning or the Senior Minister or if the accused is the Senior Minister, the incident shall be reported immediately to the Chairman of the Pastor Parish Relations Committee. Be prepared to follow the guidelines listed below:

Reporting Incidents of Abuse

- Ensure the protection of and tend to the immediate needs of the abused, as the situation requires.
- IMMEDIATELY contact the Director of Staff and Planning or the Senior Minister.
- If the allegation is made against the Senior Minister, IMMEDIATELY contact the Chairman of the Pastor Parish Relations Committee.
- The Director of Staff and Planning, Senior Minister, or Chairman of the Pastor Parish Relations Committee will gather the information concerning the allegation and notify the proper authorities.
- Church officials will be prepared to cooperate fully with the investigation conducted by law enforcement officials or child protection services.
- Any allegation will be taken seriously and needed pastoral resources will be extended.

Responding to Allegations of Abuse

- If the alleged wrongdoer is working in a volunteer or paid position with children, youth or vulnerable adults in the church, immediately, yet with dignity and respect for the sacred worth of the person, remove the alleged wrongdoer from further involvement with children, youth, or vulnerable adults.
- Once the proper authorities have been contacted and the safety of the child or youth is secured, the alleged wrongdoer may be told that the report has been made. If the alleged wrongdoer is a volunteer or paid staff of the church, that person shall be relieved temporarily of his or her duties until the investigation is finished.
- A written report of the basic allegation information shall be kept to ensure on-going ministry to and advocacy for victims and others involved. A form for this purpose shall be available in the church office. The report shall be brief and contain only factual information relevant to the situation. It shall be filed in a secure place in order to ensure confidentiality.