

Safe Sanctuaries

Creating a safe place
and reducing the risk of child abuse in the church.

Servant Church United Methodist Church

1605 E. 38 1/2 St.

Austin, TX 78722

www.servantchurchaustin.org

info@servantchurchaustin.org

Children/Youth/Vulnerable Adult Protection and Safety Policy

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THE NURTURE AND CARE OF CHILDREN, YOUTH, AND VULNERABLE ADULTS

For the purposes of this policy, **children and/or youth** are defined as anyone 17 years of age and under. A **vulnerable adult** is defined as anyone over the age of 18 who does not have age-appropriate decision-making skills or abilities. An **adult** is anyone who is 18 years of age or older. The terms *children* and *youth* may be used interchangeably for the purposes of this document and also include *vulnerable adults*.

Jesus said “Let the children come to me, and do not stop them; for it is to such as these that the kingdom of God belongs.” (Luke 18:16) He also said “Whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me.” (Matthew 18:5)

Those who entrust their children and youth to the care of the church have a right to expect that due attention has been given to the recruiting, hiring, training, and supervision of persons in charge of church programs for children and youth. As a Christian community, we believe that children and youth should be safe and well cared for, and we consider it to be our pastoral responsibility to strive to provide a loving, secure environment for children and youth in our congregation by being advocates for children and youth and establishing clearly-defined safeguards, procedures, and policies for children and youth pastoral care and protection.

Basic norms have therefore been developed for prevention of and response to child abuse. We are establishing a policy and program planning process that will:

- (1) Provide a place in which children and youth are loved and safe from all forms of abuse and neglect.
- (2) Provide paid and volunteer staff with clear and shared norms for appropriate behavior in regard to their ministries with children and youth.
- (3) Make prompt, competent and pastoral response to allegations of child abuse while immediately reporting to the necessary legal authorities (CPS, police, etc).

Our policy making and planning processes include the clergy, lay leaders, and staff who have responsibility for ministry to children or youth.

The Personnel Committee, in conjunction with the Family Ministry Coordinator, will oversee the implementation of this policy. The policy will be reviewed annually. The Family Ministry Coordinator will provide for the safekeeping of Appendix B at the church.

Servant Church United Methodist Church will make sure to carry adequate insurance coverage for the scope of ministry offered to children and youth.

Procedures for reporting known or suspected child abuse are given in Section II



Section I

CHILDREN, YOUTH, AND VULNERABLE ADULT PROTECTION

Children and youth protection encompasses several areas, including the following:

- (1) We want to be intentional about teaching and modeling appropriate parenting and adult/child interaction skills.
- (2) We desire to educate members/volunteers concerning the proper treatment of children, youth, and vulnerable adults involved in congregational programs.
- (3) We want to provide appropriate channels for reporting alleged abuse.
- (4) We want to protect possible victims.

For the purposes of this document and under Texas law, an abused child is defined as a person under the age of 18 who is the victim of sexual activity, who is endangered or neglected, or who suffers physical injury, mental injury, or death other than by accident. Child abuse may be physical, sexual, emotional, or mental, and may be the result of actions or a failure or refusal to act (e.g. lack of care for a child).

Our congregation's written policy on child, youth, and vulnerable adult abuse prevention includes, but is not limited to, the following specific areas:

1. Reflecting Jesus With Our Lives:

The way we treat children is an extension of the love God calls us to show to all people. Our Christian faith is lived out daily in our actions. These are some of the ways we live out our faith and want to model for our children and youth:

- Seek to model the Fruits of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22-23)
- Integrity in all personal relationships (Ezekiel 18:7-9)
- Growth in grace and knowledge of the love God (Mark 12: 29-31)

Since the beginning of the Methodists movement, Methodists have tried to live three simple rules and hold each other accountable to them:

- A. Do no harm
- B. Do Good.
- C. Love God

2. Parenting Skills:

- When possible, we will provide classes for members of the church and community on sound parenting skills and child- and youth-abuse prevention.

3. Training:

- Training on issues of child sexual abuse in church settings is required for all clergy, paid staff, and volunteers who regularly work with children and youth (i.e., Sunday school teachers, youth group leaders, etc.).
- Training will include church policy on children and youth protection and safety, procedures to be used in ministry with children and youth, appropriate steps to report an incident of abuse, and details of state laws regarding child abuse.
- A copy of the current Servant Church UMC Safe Sanctuaries policy will be given to all clergy, paid staff, and volunteers who regularly work with children and youth.
- Church-wide training will be offered at least annually.
- Servant Church UMC's Safe Sanctuaries policy will be available on the church website.
- CPR training will be offered for all workers with children and youth and will be encouraged for all

volunteers.

- Safe Sanctuaries and other trainings (such as classroom management, positive behavior reinforcement, etc) for individuals may be offered by a staff person on an as-needed basis.

4. Communication/Supervision:

- It is important that all staff, paid and volunteer, be involved in regular, scheduled ministry meetings to discuss prevention measures, policies, problems, and potential problems.
- Clarification of staff actions and plans of action should be open for discussion at any meeting.
- While a person who has been convicted of child abuse who is a member of the congregation is to receive the normal pastoral care afforded any child of God, at no time is a person convicted of child abuse or with a history of questionable behavior with children as determined by a background check to be assigned to ministries with children or youth.
- Parents will be informed that this Children and Youth Protection policy exists and will be invited to know its contents.
- Parents will be provided advance notice and full information about activities involving children and youth.

5. Individual Interaction:

- One-on-one interactions between an adult and a child or youth are sometimes necessary and appropriate, but care must be taken that they be conducted in an environment that provides visibility to other adults.
- Another adult is to have knowledge of adult whereabouts and with whom they are meeting in cases of a minor.

6. Adult Presence:

- All church-sponsored or community groups of children or youth who meet at the church will have two or more adult leaders (2 adults cannot be related to one another) present.
- When the group includes both boys and girls, and parents are not present, it is strongly recommended that both male and female adult leaders be present.
- For children and youth Sunday classes, if it is not possible to have two adults in the classroom on Sunday morning the class will not meet.
- No workers under the age of 18 will have sole responsibility, nor be alone with, any children.
- There should be at least a 5-year age difference between the oldest child/youth in the event and the adult volunteer/worker.
- All volunteers and paid child caregivers will undergo a thorough background check before offering care to the children.

7. Touch:

- God embraces children and youth with love, placing their nurture and care in our hands.
- Christian community includes physical touching as an expression of affection. We hold up common positive examples of touching such as the laying on of hands in healing and the holding of hands in prayer and passing the peace.
- We also recognize evil and understand that the human capacity for evil can corrupt even the holiest of gifts. Therefore, we advise our touching and affection to be limited to those public activities commonly held appropriate in worship spaces such passing the peace, hugs, high-fives, and other platonic forms of affection.
- Child-initiated hugs may be returned by adult workers in an appropriate manner keeping in mind the policies of this Safe Sanctuaries document.
- With the exception of attending to infants' and toddlers' hygienic needs, touching children or youth

on the genitals, allowing them to touch one another's genitals, or allowing children or youth to touch the genitals of an adult is always inappropriate in any church activity or setting.

- Violence to children and youth (physical, emotional, or spiritual) is never appropriate in a church activity or elsewhere.

Section I

CHILDREN, YOUTH, AND VULNERABLE ADULT PROTECTION (continued)

8. Overnight Trips and Field Trips:

- Situations in which paid or volunteer staff members are taking children or youth on field trips away from the church for long periods of time or for overnight outings are to be carefully planned by the staff and all details fully disclosed to the parents/guardians.
- In no circumstance is one adult to take a child/youth or children on an overnight outing alone.
- In addition, when a group is going on an overnight that includes both boys and girls, and parents are not present, it is required that both male and female leaders be present.
- Permission slips and emergency medical forms are to be completed by parents/guardians and be kept by the event organizer at the event.

9. Open Door Policy:

- Protection for children and youth requires that an open door policy be followed. The parents of the children served, the clergy, and administrative and professional staff of the church have the right to visit and observe the children or youth activity, classroom, or church- sponsored program at any time, unannounced.

10. Discipline Policy:

- Children and youth are expected to show respect for adults and each other during all church activities.
- Children and youth will be treated with respect. They will not be spanked or disciplined in ways that deprive them of their basic right to be safe.
- Discipline is expected to be appropriate for the child or youth's age. Discipline, beyond basic classroom management, will be discussed with parents.
- Appropriate responses to inappropriate behavior include verbally reprimanding the child or youth, separating the child or youth from the group (time out - but always with adult supervision), notifying parents of the problem, and/or taking a disruptive child or youth to a parent or a church staff member.

11. Driving Policy:

- The policy on driving stipulates criteria and restrictions that apply to drivers for church-sponsored activities. (See Appendix A, Servant Church UMC Driving Policy.)
- If a church-sponsored group leaves the premises, two or more leaders must accompany the group.
- A written permission slip must be signed by a child's parent or guardian prior to departure.

12. Background Checks and Hiring Policies:

- Thorough background checks will be made of all paid staff and volunteers who have regular responsibility for children and/or youth, as well as all other church program employees, to the extent permitted by law, prior to employment to determine current or historic child abuse or sexual misconduct, criminal records, or pedophilic behavior.
- All persons, paid and volunteer, who work with children and/or youth shall sign a form consenting in advance to a background check.
- In the case of clergy, this congregation will rely on thorough background checks made by the UMC Conference.
- No person who has had a child abuse conviction shall be permitted to work with children and/or youth.

- No person who refuses to sign the Consent Form shall be permitted to work with children and/or youth.
- All clergy, lay staff, and volunteers with children and youth shall sign the Policy Awareness Acknowledgment (Appendix C), signifying that they have read and understand the congregation's policy.

13. Photographs of Children and Youth

Permission is required prior to posting photographs of children and youth on the church website, bulletin boards, or other promotional media.

- Parents are able to give this permission on the Sunday registration forms or through a separate form kept in the church office.
- Only pictures of children whose parents have given consent can be posted on social media such as but not limited to Facebook, Instagram, etc.
- Children should not be tagged in any pictures posted on social media, including, but not limited to Facebook, Instagram, etc.

Section II

CHILDREN, YOUTH, AND VULNERABLE ADULTS ABUSE REPORTING PROCEDURES

Reporting Abuse

1. State requirements: The reporting requirements of the State of Texas must be complied with. Each reporting procedure shall reflect this requirement. The State requirements will be outlined clearly at each training session. **Listed below is information from the State of Texas regarding child abuse reporting:**

In Texas, anyone who suspects that a child is being abused or neglected has a legal obligation to report it.

Helpful Guidelines from the Department of Family and Protective Services on Reporting Abuse:

What if I'm not sure?

If you have reason to suspect abuse, but are not positive, make the report. If you have any doubts about whether or not it is abuse, call the hotline. They can advise you on whether the signs you have observed are abuse.

What are Abuse, Neglect, and Exploitation?

- **Abuse is mental, emotional, physical, or sexual injury to a child or person 65 years or older or an adult with disabilities or failure to prevent such injury.**
- **Neglect of a child includes failure to provide a child with food, clothing, shelter and/or medical care; and/or leaving a child in a situation where the child is at risk of harm.**
- **Neglect of a person 65 years or older or an adult with disabilities that results in starvation, dehydration, over- or under-medication, unsanitary living conditions, and lack of heat, running water, electricity, medical care, and personal hygiene.**
- **Exploitation is misusing the resources of a person 65 years or older or an adult with disabilities for personal or monetary benefit. This includes taking Social Security or SSI (Supplemental Security Income) checks, abusing a joint checking account, and taking property and other resources.**

What will I be asked?

Information helpful to have on hand when filing an abuse report (if known) includes:

- **Name, age, and address of the child or person 65 years or older or an adult with disabilities**
- **Your name and contact information**
- **Brief description of the situation and the child or vulnerable adult**
- **Current injuries, medical problems, or behavioral problems**
- **For a child: Parents' names and names of siblings in the home**
- **For an adult: Names of relatives in or outside the home and name of perpetrator**
- **Explain how you know about the situation**

[accessed from http://www.dfps.state.tx.us/documents/Contact_Us/documents/swiflyer.pdf on 4/9/15]

Abuse Reporting Procedures for Servant Church UMC:

- The person who observes evidence of or has reason to believe that abuse of a vulnerable person is happening is responsible for making the report directly to the Abuse Hotline at: 1-800-252-5400 or can be made online if the situation does not require immediate action, <https://www.txabusehotline.org>
- A situation may be discussed with a staff member, but it is the responsibility of the person who observes or has evidence of or reason to believe that abuse is happening to make the report. A staff member cannot make that report for you, but will be happy to support you during the process if needed.
- Additionally, NO ONE needs permission to make a report. We request that the staff be informed to provide pastoral care and support for all involved in the situation.

2. Conference requirements: Each procedure for reporting alleged abuse must contain a method by which the alleged abuse within Servant Church United Methodist Church or one of its sponsored events is reported. This method shall not negate the State's reporting requirements or the "Fair Process in Judicial Proceedings" in Paragraphs 2701-2706 of the 2008 Book of Discipline.

3. Servant Church United Methodist Church requirements: The Senior Pastor, and/or his designee, will receive reports of alleged abuse of children, youth, and/or adults. Confidentiality of information will be maintained to the extent possible.

4. All reports of alleged abuse should be documented in writing and brought immediately to the attention of the person(s) designated by Servant Church United Methodist Church or the sponsored event to receive such information. Reports are confidential and the utmost care will be taken to protect the safety of victims and the accused.

5. Each procedure for reporting alleged abuse should include at a minimum the following:

- a. Who is making the report and the relevant information about that person;
- b. The person's responsibility and obligation to report;
- c. A clearly written factual basis for making the report, specifically which provision is violated and how;
- d. A description of the symptoms and behavior the reporter has observed in the child, youth or vulnerable adult, if any;

6. No report should be considered trivial and not reported.

7. Forms shall be available in the church office for reporting alleged abuse.

8. It is very important that confidentiality and sensitivity to the alleged victim and the victim's family, as well as to the accused be maintained. Pastoral care will be available to all in the time of crisis.

9. All actions regarding the complaint shall be documented and kept on file.

10. A designated spokesperson will be solely responsible for responding to any media interest.

11. A brief and honest statement to be made to the congregation without giving unnecessary details, placing blame, interfering with the victim's privacy, or violating confidentiality should be prepared.

12. Full cooperation will be given to law enforcement officials and child protective services.

Appendix A

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DRIVING POLICY

Purpose: To promote the safety of persons being transported by vehicle to Servant Church UMC functions and/or on Servant Church UMC business.

Policy: Whenever staff or volunteers use their private vehicles for field trips, business trips, sick or elderly transportation and visitation, or the transport of children and/or youth, there are some very important risk control measures that must be taken by the church. Each time a driver gets behind the wheel as a church staff member or volunteer to transport others, the lives of others are in that driver's hands.

- Specific documentation must be supplied by all staff or volunteer drivers. This documentation should include:
 - a) current driver's license
 - b) vehicle registration, including expiration
 - c) proof of automobile liability insurance
 - d) a current safety inspection certificate, where applicable

- In addition to the required documentation, each driver should adhere to the following regulations:
 - a) All drivers must be 25 years of age or older.
 - b) The number of passengers may not exceed the number of working passenger seat belts.
 - c) The driver and all passengers must wear seat belts at all times.

- Drivers who transport a single child or youth (such as giving a youth a ride home from a church event) may take care to avoid any implication of impropriety by having two adults in the car at all times.

- When using rental cars, the event organizer is responsible for verifying the rental company's policy regarding drivers (age, multiple drivers, insurance, etc.).

- 16-passenger vans will not be used to transport people for safety reasons.

Implementation: It is the responsibility of the event organizer to distribute this document to each staff member or volunteer driver and to enforce the policy.

Appendix B

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POLICY AWARENESS ACKNOWLEDGMENT

After reviewing the Servant Church United Methodist Church’s policy for protection of children, youth, and vulnerable adults, all clergy, paid staff, and volunteers who teach or work with children, youth, and vulnerable adults must sign this form, indicating their familiarity with the policy.

I have read and I understand the policy entitled Servant Church United Methodist Church, Children, Youth, and Vulnerable Adults Safe Sanctuaries Policy.

I agree to abide by this policy for the protection of children, youth, and vulnerable adults and the prevention and management of child abuse.

Name:

Signature:

Date:

Supervisor Signature/Title: