

**ST. MARK'S
UNITED METHODIST CHURCH
1267 NORTH RUTHERFORD BOULEVARD
MURFREESBORO, TN 37130**

**SAFE SANCTUARIES POLICY
AND
IMPLEMENTATION MANUAL**

*“With God’s help
We will so order our lives after the example of Christ,
That this child, surrounded by steadfast love,
May be established in the faith,
And confirmed and strengthened
In the way that leads to life eternal.”*

*The Congregational Pledge to Baptized Children
Taken from
The United Methodist Hymnal, p. 44
UMPH, 1989*

(Revised May, 2023)

ST. MARK'S UNITED METHODIST CHURCH SAFE SANCTUARIES POLICY

OUR CALLING

St. Mark's United Methodist Church is a sacred place where God's people of all ages come together for worship, study, service and fellowship. The ministries of St. Mark's seek to share the Good News of the Gospel of Christ and make disciples of Jesus Christ, that all who enter may come to know God and experience the love of Christ.

OUR MANDATE

According to the Tennessee Department of Human Services, more than 70,000 children per year in the State of Tennessee are reported to be abused or neglected. Approximately 50 percent of these children were alleged to be physically or sexually abused.

In 1996, the General Conference of the United Methodist Church adopted a resolution aimed at reducing the risk of child sexual abuse in the church. The Tennessee Conference of the United Methodist Church issued a mandate that all churches shall implement a plan to prevent child abuse by December 31, 2008.

OUR PURPOSE

The purpose of this document is to ensure that the members and staff of St. Mark's United Methodist Church do all they can to provide a safe and secure environment for nursery, preschoolers, children, youth, and all persons entrusted to our care. The following policies and procedures are for the protection of our children, youth, employees, volunteers and our entire church family at St. Marks United Methodist Church, Murfreesboro, Tennessee. By establishing these policies and procedures, we demonstrate our commitment to provide a safe environment for our children and youth as they grow in their relationship with God. We believe it is possible for us to greatly reduce the risk of abuse by following these procedures.

OUR COVENANT

Therefore, as a Christian community of faith and a United Methodist congregation, we pledge to conduct the ministry of Jesus Christ in ways that assure the safety of our children and youth, as well as of the workers with children and youth. We will follow reasonable safety measures in the selection and recruitment of workers; we will implement prudential operating procedures in our ministries; we will educate our workers with children and youth regarding the use of appropriate procedures; we will have a clearly defined procedure for reporting a suspected incident of abuse that conforms to the requirements of the laws of the State of Tennessee; and we will be prepared to respond should such an incident occur.

In all our ministries with Children and Youth, this congregation is committed to demonstrating the love of Jesus Christ so that each child will be "surrounded by steadfast love.... Established in the faith... and confirmed and strengthened in the way that leads to life eternal." (*Baptismal Covenant II, The United Methodist Hymnal*, p. 44).

ST. MARK'S UNITED METHODIST CHURCH SAFE SANCTUARIES IMPLEMENTATION MANUAL

DEFINITIONS

Children – Persons Birth – Grade 5

Youth – Persons attending Grades 6 - 12

Adults – Persons over 21 Years of Age*

**While persons are legally considered an adult at age 18, to encourage adherence to the 3-year rule, St. Mark's Safe Sanctuaries requires that "adults" be over 21 years of age.*

Intern/Assistant – Persons employed temporarily to assist with special ministry areas

GENERAL PROCEDURES

- 1) St. Mark's Safe Sanctuaries policy will be approved by the Church Council and available to all church members.
 - a. Staff and Volunteers with children and youth will receive a copy of St. Mark's Safe Sanctuaries Policy.
 - b. Parents will receive a copy of the Safe Sanctuaries Policy when they have a new infant entering the Nursery, when their children enter the Children's Ministries at Age 2 and Grade 2, and when their children enter the Youth Ministry at Grade 6.
 - c. The Safe Sanctuary Policy will be included in our new member packets, available for pick-up in the church information area, and available online at www.stmarkstn.org.
 - d. The St. Mark's Safe Sanctuaries Policy and Implementation Manual will be reviewed annually by a task force consisting of the persons who fill the following positions:
 - i. Minister of Education
 - ii. Minister of Music
 - iii. Minister with Youth
 - iv. Preschool Director
 - v. Nursery Manager
 - vi. Lay Representative of the Children's Ministries Team
 - vii. Lay Representative of the Youth Ministries Team
 - viii. Lay Representative of the Board of Trustees
 - ix. Lay Representative of the Staff Parish Committee
 - x. Counsel or another appropriate designee of staff with specialized knowledge relevant to the task.
- 2) Volunteers with Children and Youth will be offered training in regard to the implementation of that policy. At the training, all participants will be required to authorize St. Mark's UMC to complete a background check and sign a Safe Sanctuaries participation covenant (Appendix A).
- 3) Facility doors will be locked when not in use, including kitchens, classrooms, closets and library. Christian education classrooms will be opened 15-30 minutes prior to the Christian Education hour and closed 15-30 minutes following the Christian Education hour. The door from the Narthex into the Elementary hallway will be locked during operating hours for St. Mark's Preschool and PDO.

- 4) Staff, leaders, and other volunteers will know the location of emergency aid kits.
 - a. First Aid kits are available in the main kitchen, all kitchenettes, and in the Recreation Center and office.
 - b. An **automated external defibrillator** or **AED** (a portable electronic device that automatically diagnoses cardiac arrhythmias and is able to treat them through defibrillation) is located in the Narthex. With simple audio and visual commands, AEDs are designed to be simple to use for the average person.
- 5) No fewer than two leaders will be present at all children and youth events, on or off campus, including in every vehicle transporting children or youth. At least one leader present will be an adult, 21 years of age or older, who has been an active part of St. Mark's UMC for six months or longer, has authorized a background check and has been trained in Safe Sanctuaries policies and procedures.
 - a. When it is not feasible to have 2 leaders in every room, such as when a large group has divided into smaller groups, doors will remain open and a floater will check on each group.
 - b. All teachers and leaders are strongly encouraged to avoid being alone with a child or a youth.
 - c. For overnight events, at least two adults of each gender will be present. At single-gender overnight events, at least two or more adults present will be of the same gender as the participating children/youth.
- 6) Volunteers who serve as teachers and leaders of children and youth will be at least three years older than the oldest person they are teaching or leading.
- 7) Volunteers and staff who work with children and youth will be required to submit to a background check.
 - a. All aspects of the background check are completed online. Volunteers and Staff submitting to a background check must respond to an invitation sent via email from the Business Administrator.
 - b. Background checks for St. Mark's employees and volunteers will be paid for through the church budget. Background checks for volunteers for other organizations are the responsibility of that organization.
 - c. Only the Senior Pastor and/or Business Administrator will see the results of the background checks and determine the eligibility of persons to work with children and youth. Other staff members will receive a list of persons who have been approved for service with children and youth.
 - d. All background checks will be kept confidential.
 - e. Background checks must be renewed every 5 years.
 - f. Persons who have resided in Tennessee less than 3 years will have a background check in their previous state of residence.
 - g. Persons who are found to represent a potential threat of committing abuse or violating this policy will not be allowed to serve as teachers, leaders or helpers with children and youth.

- 8) A minimum ratio of 1 adult volunteer worker per 10 children/youth will be maintained in each situation involving the supervision of children and youth.
- 9) St. Mark's UMC is responsible for each child/youth in attendance at an event from the beginning to the end of the event, in the location that the event occurs. Parents must be attentive to sign-in procedures.
 - a. Children may not leave prior to the ending of an event without prior notice from a parent.
 - b. Children will only be released to persons other than parents if prior contact has occurred between the parents and the staff person in charge.
 - c. St. Mark's UMC is not responsible for children/youth who are not signed in to an event.

10) Permission forms will be required for each off-campus event involving children and youth.

- 11) All Facebook groups associated with Preschool, Children's or Youth ministry areas will be designated as "closed" groups, requiring all those who wish to gain access to be approved by the group administrators.

All church-related Facebook groups and pages must have at least two administrators. If an administrator is no longer associated with the ministry, that individual's administrative status must be revoked.

Photos may be posted to the Facebook page by page administrators. Photos must not be tagged with name or location indicators. Parents must be given the opportunity to opt out of this to prohibit posting. All photos must be appropriate and within the spirit of the mission of our ministry. Photos used in other mediums such as church newsletters, websites, blogs, etc. must not include any identifying information of minors. Individuals (including minors) are welcome to identify ("tag") themselves. We discourage youth and adults from taking and posting photos of children participating in church events on all personal social media sites.

When checking in on Facebook, Instagram, or any location-tagging social media, only check in yourself. Never check in minors. Be sensitive to tagging or revealing other participants' location without their expressed permission.

In the case of clergy and member online connections, Friend requests (et al) should be initiated by the member, especially if the member is a minor or vulnerable adult.

- 12) All outside organizations that use the church facility or church grounds will abide by St. Mark's Safe Sanctuaries policies and procedures. Such organizations will be asked to sign a covenant that they have read and agree to abide by St. Mark's Safe Sanctuaries policies and procedures.
- 13) Hallway windows may not be covered when rooms are in use by children or youth.
- 14) Liability insurance coverage: St. Mark's Trustees shall maintain liability insurance coverage of at least \$1,000,000 per event/\$3,000,000 aggregate for activities both on and off church property. Liability insurance should include at least \$300,000 coverage for sexual misconduct claims.

PROCEDURES SPECIFIC TO CHILDREN NAD YOUTH

- 1) Children will attend the appropriate grade/age level equivalent to the grade/age level they attend in school or preschool.
 - a. Preschool children should be placed in classes according to their birth dates, following the same guidelines as the State of Tennessee. A child must reach the age-level of the class by the specified date of that year to be eligible for attendance. In other words, to attend the 2 Year-Old class that begins August 1, 2014, the child must have his/her 2nd birthday prior to August 15, 2014.
 - b. Any child in Kindergarten or above should attend the same grade level of Christian education as they attend in school.
 - c. If a child repeats or defers attendance of a grade in school, that child will also repeat or defer attendance of that grade in Christian education.
 - d. Promotion occurs in August. Children move to the next grade level at that time.
- 2) Children Birth through Grade 1 will be signed into and out of any activity by an adult, preferably a parent. It is recommended that signing in and out occur five minutes prior to and five minutes after an event. If a child is not picked up within 10 minutes of the close of Sunday school, that child will be signed into the Nursery.
 - a. Children Birth – Grade 1 may not be released to a sibling less than 18 years of age without written parental permission.
 - b. Children in Grades 2 – 5 may sign themselves in and out of a classroom or event in the presence of a parent or other adult guardian.
 - c. Youth in Grades 6 – 12 may sign themselves into or out of a classroom or event without their parents being present.
- 3) Children and Youth not currently signed into a classroom or event are the responsibility of their parents and must be attended to by their parents. Children must be supervised at all times while on church property.
- 4) Parents or other adults who bring children to St. Mark's are encouraged to remain on the property while their children are signed into St. Mark's ministries. Persons who leave the property while the children for whom they are responsible are signed into classes or events will provide emergency contact information.
- 5) Like other class rolls, the Sunday school sign-in sheets will become a part of the permanent attendance records and Sunday school archives.
- 6) During Christian education class time, children Age 2 – Grade 1 will use the restrooms connected to their classrooms. Children Grades 2 – 5 will go to the nearest restroom.
- 7) Children using the restrooms attached to the Furniture/Boy Scout Building must be accompanied by a parent.

PROCEDURES FOR REPORTING INCIDENTS OF ABUSE

- 1) According to the laws of the State of Tennessee, all persons are mandatory reporters of child abuse. If a person learns of or witnesses an instance of abuse, that person shall immediately report the alleged incident of abuse or suspected abuse to the appropriate county or state authorities. The telephone number for reporting incidents in the State of Tennessee is 1-887-237-0004.
- 2) Incidents of abuse or reasonably suspected incidents of abuse of children or youth will also be reported as soon as possible to the Senior Pastor or another St. Mark's staff member. In the case that the pastor is the person accused, the incident should be reported to the Stones River District Superintendent of the United Methodist Church at 615-893-5886.
- 3) The person reporting the incident will document, in writing, all known facts and circumstances and will also make a report that documents all steps taken in the course of handling the reported incident using the appropriate forms (See Appendix D).
- 4) The pastor and/or staff member will document all actions taken in reporting the incident of abuse using the appropriate forms (See Appendix D).
- 5) The confidentiality of all persons involved will be safeguarded.

RESPONDING TO ALLEGATIONS OF ABUSE

- 1) Every allegation will be taken seriously. Adequate care and respect must be offered to the alleged victims and alleged perpetrators until the allegation can be substantiated or cleared.
- 2) The safety and security of the alleged victim must be safeguarded before the person accused of abuse is confronted.
- 3) The parents/guardians of the suspected victim will be notified immediately.
- 4) All procedures listed in the previous section on Reporting will be strictly followed.
- 5) All records relating to the matter will be maintained in confidential files.
- 6) All efforts in handling the situation will be carefully documented.
- 7) The Senior Pastor or his/her designee will notify the liability insurer and the legal counsel for the Church about the alleged incident.
- 8) The Senior Pastor will be the sole spokesperson for St. Mark's United Methodist Church and the District Superintendent will be the sole spokesperson for the district insofar as media inquiries are concerned.
- 9) Any person accused must be treated with dignity and support. That person will be immediately relieved of further responsibilities, as circumstances dictate, until the allegations are cleared or substantiated.