



# Saint Mark United Methodist Church

WELCOME  
TO  
SAINT  
MARK

St. Mark  
United Methodist  
Church

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Safe  
Sanctuary  
Training

# Our Biblical Mandate



“But Jesus called for them, and said, “Let the little children come to me and do not stop them; for it is such as these that the kingdom of God belongs.” --Luke 18:16

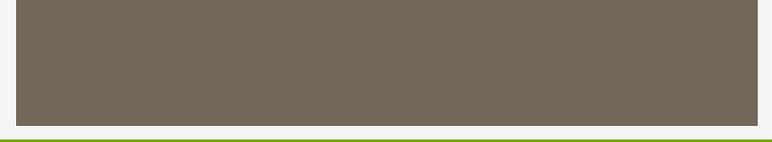
“Whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me.” --Matthew 18:5

# The Subject of Child Abuse...

- is a difficult and complex subject
- makes us feel uncomfortable
- might scare away church volunteers
- shouldn't happen in the church
- is painful for persons who may have been victims of child abuse

# Purpose of Training

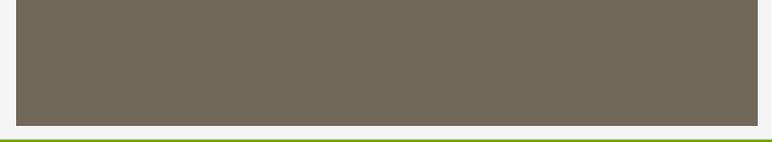
- To explain that child abuse does happen in churches with devastating consequences
- To define types of child abuse and increase our awareness of signs and symptoms
- To identify areas of vulnerability within church ministries and programs
- To outline risk reduction procedures



St. Mark United Methodist Church (SMUMC) is a spiritual community, which takes seriously its responsibility to provide a safe and nurturing environment for children and youth who participate in our ministries.

In keeping with our covenant relationship with God, we honor our Lord and all who seek Him, by doing justice, loving kindness and walking humbly with Him. (Micah 6:8)

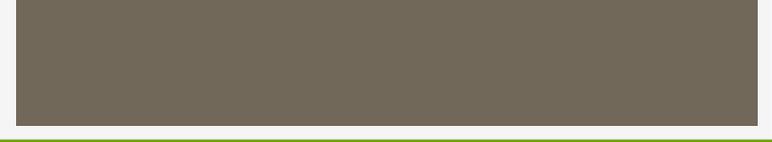
All volunteers and employees who are in leadership roles in these ministries are living out the vows we take in baptism to nurture our children and youth in the Christian faith.



Every church worker plays a key role in fostering the spiritual development of individuals and families in our church community.

The disturbing and traumatic rise of physical and sexual abuse of children and youth has claimed the attention of our nation and society.

The following statements reflect the commitment of SMUMC to provide a safe environment for all children and youth and church workers who participate in church sponsored ministries.



In an effort to provide a safe community, this church requires all church employees and volunteers to commit themselves to the Safe Sanctuary policy for the protection of children and youth adopted by this church.

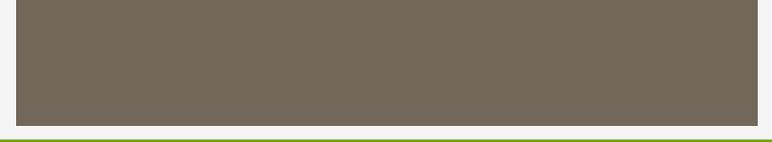
As members and participants in the programs, we pledge to conduct ourselves in a manner consistent with the teachings of Christ. We will guard our thoughts and tongues and will refrain from any behaviors which corrupt our witness for Christ.

Our actions and choices will reflect prudence, purity of heart, and an earnest love for the will of God.

Children, youth and vulnerable adults are defined as minors under the age of 18 and adults with special needs.

Commitment to this policy will require church workers to provide personal information, review the Safe Sanctuary policy and understand that they will be under the supervision of their respective leaders.





The Safe Sanctuary policy is a comprehensive effort for the benefit of the entire SMUMC congregation and to all visitors and participants in our programs and events.

Every staff member will be expected to conduct his/her duties with strict adherence to the guidelines outlined within this policy. The policy will be maintained and updated by those responsible for enforcing Safe Sanctuary.

They will also be responsible for conducting periodic, random compliance audits and review this policy once a year, to verify that all materials have been appropriately updated.

# Definition:

- Abuse is defined as any sexual contact, sexual language, indecent exposure, or communication for immoral purposes, as well as physical abuses such as corporal punishment or physical assault.

The law recognizes that no minors can consent to sexual contact or physical abuse because of their age and vulnerability. The church affirms this position and will not tolerate any abuse.



The responsible ministers will meet at least annually to update members on policy or program changes and to verify that the team is fulfilling its obligations to the congregation.

The team will be assembled for emergency purposes at any time, following any reportable incident and as often as necessary to revise procedures, provide instruction/assistance to clergy, staff or volunteers.

The team will keep members of the congregation properly informed of SMUMC Safe Sanctuary policy and its ongoing administration. The ministers will also be responsible for coordinating the training for all staff and volunteer workers in these policies and procedures.

# Hiring, Placement & Training of Compensated Workers & Volunteers

Who is covered by this policy:

- Employees of St. Mark UMC

Anyone receiving compensation from the Church must have a background check consisting of the following:

1. Prior employment verification
2. Personal and Work References and screening
3. Background Check for Criminal Record, and Sex Offender, requires completion of Authorization and Request for Criminal Record Check (Appendix C)

## Hiring, Placement & Training of Compensated Workers & Volunteers

No applicant that is found to have been involved in any activity, in which the applicant abused, exploited, or neglected children or youth will be approved.

Any conviction of a crime against children and youth shall disqualify any applicant.

The SPRC reserves the right to also disqualify applicants that have been convicted of other violent offenses or have been convicted of behaviors which indicate that the applicant is ill-suited to work with children, and youth.

# Hiring, Placement & Training of Compensated Workers & Volunteers

Who is covered by this policy:

- Volunteers

A volunteer is an individual serving without compensation. All volunteers must complete an information form (Appendix A), Volunteer Covenant (Appendix B), and an Authorization and Request for Criminal Record Check (Appendix C). Background checks should be completed every two years, as a minimum, unless otherwise needed.

## Children's Ministries

These procedures cover the activities in the Children's Ministries of SMUMC. The nursery age is from birth up to 3 years of age and the children's age is 3 years through 6th grade.



# Children's Ministries

1. It is the responsibility of the parent or custodian to indicate to the Children's minister if there are any allergy or custody concerns regarding the child.
2. The parent/custodian shall fill out the sign in sheet with his/her full name, the child's full name, where the parent/custodian will be while the child is attending.

# Nursery

Only trained, assigned workers/volunteers will be allowed in the nursery area. No other individuals will be allowed in these areas without the approval of the nursery supervisor.



# Children's Ministries

A. **Two Adult Rule** -Whenever practicable, a minimum of two teachers shall be present during any children's activity. We will strive to never have a teacher working alone with any children. When two adults are not available, the door to the classroom will remain open.

B. **Open-door-policy** - All children's classrooms will have either a viewing window that will remain free of covering or a Dutch door where the top door will remain open at all times. If the classroom does not have a Dutch door or viewing window, the door must remain open at all times. The teachers/volunteers shall never be in a closed-door situation with any children.

C. **Visible Presence** - SMUMC's children's rooms are all adjacent to high traffic areas (such as the atrium) and remain easily visible and audible when children are present.

**D. Restroom Policies** - In situations where an escort is needed for a trip to the restroom, a teacher will stand outside the restroom and only assist the child if needed.

Whenever a teacher is in the restroom with a child the door will remain open. The teacher shall never be in a closed door situation with a child. If a child soils himself, every attempt will be made to have two adult volunteers present while cleaning up the child.

**E. Discipline** - Corporal punishment, of any kind, is never appropriate. Teachers are asked to redirect a child if they should display inappropriate behavior. The parents/guardian of the child will be notified in extreme cases as determined by the teacher(s).

**F. Staff and Administrators** - As appropriate, a staff member or administrator will supervise ongoing programs and may make unannounced visits into classrooms or other program sites.

## Youth Protection Procedures

These procedures cover the activities of the youth at St. Mark United Methodist Church.

Children are placed in the youth division from the 7th grade through completion of the 12th grade.

In order to participate in any church sponsored child/youth activity, a signed parent permission form must be submitted.



# Youth Protection Procedures

## I. Supervision of Youth

1. *For safety purposes*, with high school and middle school students there will be, whenever possible, one adult for every seven youth.
2. *For purposes of supervising youth*, an adult is defined as anyone who is at least 23 years old. Anyone under the age of 23 must be screened and approved by the Youth Minister before allowed to be used in a leadership position.
3. The youth ministry assumes responsibility for supervision of youth from 15 minutes before a scheduled event until 15 minutes after a scheduled event.
4. The youth ministry is not responsible for youth at times when no youth ministry offerings are scheduled and also not responsible for youth when youth are choosing not to participate in the youth ministry offerings which are scheduled. Youth parents will be contacted to pick up their child if they choose not to participate.

# Youth Protection Procedures

## II. Guidelines for Youth Counseling in Informal and/or Individual Settings

A. Counseling with youth by someone of the same sex is encouraged. However, ministry priorities and immediate circumstances may make same sex counseling unfeasible. When occasions of other than counseling by someone of the same sex occur, a youth worker should seek to abide by the “two-adult rule.”

B. In a situation where the “two-adult rule” is not feasible, a youth worker is expected to move him/herself and the youth being counseled, to the rest of the group to find a second adult.

C. The youth ministry has an interest in helping youth and youth ministry workers maintain appropriate boundaries. Youth workers need to communicate the message that, “I am your friend, but I am not your peer” clearly at all times.

D. *Non-parental Adults:* Youth workers under the age of 23 need to maintain the distinction between leader and peers. They will not have authority over students, but will be invited to lead by example. When they are in this leadership position their prior relationship becomes secondary. Youth workers over the age of 23 must also be aware of the distinction between leaders and peers.

# Youth Protection Procedures

## III. Guidelines for Youth Counseling in Formal and/or Group Settings

A. In a Sunday School class or a small group setting, the goal is to have two adults, or an adult with an observer, in every room; if not, the open door policy will be in effect.

B. In Youth Fellowship, the goal is to have one adult for every seven youth in attendance. If possible, when dividing into small groups, two adults per group is advisable.



# Youth Protection Procedures

## **IV. Transportation Procedures for Children/Youth Activities**

The following procedures are for providing transportation for Youth to and from activities sponsored and/or supervised by SMUMC and affiliates. These procedures relate to transportation provided by the church, parents of youth, and youth workers to and from activities off the church property.

### **A. Vehicle Requirements:**

1. These vehicle requirements pertain to vehicles owned by SMUMC, those provided by parents of participating youth, those provided by youth workers and any external commercial vehicles provided for transportation of children/youth.
2. All vehicles shall be in good running order, have a current valid license plate, and passenger restraints. The passenger restraints must be used while transporting children/youth.
3. All vehicles shall have insurance coverage as required by South Carolina law.
4. All vehicles will be multi-passenger vehicles. No motorcycles, scooters, or mopeds will be allowed. No vehicle will be allowed to carry more than the passenger capacity as specified by the vehicle manufacturer.

# Youth Protection Procedures

## B. Qualification of Drivers:

1. All drivers will be qualified by the Safe Sanctuary Policy. The Youth Minister will pre-approve all drivers.
2. All drivers will have a current, valid, driver's license with the classification for the vehicle being driven **and** current proof of insurance. Copies of which must be on file in the church office.
3. All drivers will be subject to checks of their motor vehicle record every three years unless otherwise warranted.
4. A minimum of two adults shall supervise all groups of children and youth on off-site events.



# Youth Protection Procedures

## **C. General Rules for Transportation:**

1. Unless otherwise approved by the administrator and the parents/custodians, all transportation subject to these procedures will begin and terminate at the church property.
2. All drivers will obey all traffic laws. Failure to do so may disqualify them from driving for church related activities.
3. For any child/youth church function, signed parent permission forms will be obtained prior to being allowed in any of these vehicles. If the youth does not have a completed permission form he/she will not be permitted to participate in the transportation arranged by the church.
4. If possible, there will always be more than one youth in the vehicle. In the event there is one child or youth in the vehicle the minor must be seated in the rear seat of the vehicle. The two-adult rule does not apply in the parent-child relationship.
5. Driver is not to text or use a cell phone while the car is in motion.

# Youth Protection Procedures

## **VI. Rules of Conduct for Youth Overnight Activities**

A. All persons are to abide by the Safe Sanctuary policy, including the team approach for supervision.

B. None of the youth will be allowed away from the designated overnight area without prior permission of the group leader and the parent's signed permission.

C. No members of the opposite sex will be allowed to sleep in the same room, except where supervised by the number of adults required.

D. The Youth covenant and a permission form must be signed by the youth and their parents before being allowed to participate in overnight or other church sponsored youth activities .

E. Adults will not be allowed to sleep in the same bed with a youth unless the youth is their child.

# Covenants

## **Sample Covenant & Administration of Signed Covenants**

A sample Covenant is provided in Appendix B. The Church Office will maintain copies of signed covenants along with the volunteer applications. Responsible may periodically conduct random audits of the files to validate proper record keeping compliance.



# Incident Reporting

## Report of Suspected Incident of Child Abuse (Appendix D)

A. Reporting: Do not ignore any reported incident of abuse. Any suspicious activity, observed abuse, or victim allegations that are brought to the attention of a church worker or volunteer must be reported immediately to the persons identified below:

### 1. Allegations against volunteers

- The accused adult should never be confronted before the safety of the child or youth is secured.
- The volunteer will be suspended of all duties by the appropriate program director until accusations are investigated and a conclusion is reached.
- The report shall be made to the appropriate program director.
- The Director shall, in turn, report to the Pastor.
- The Pastor and Director shall determine if the District Superintendent should be notified.

# Incident Reporting

## 2. Allegations against Employees

- For any employee, other than the Pastor, the report shall be made to the Chairperson of the Staff Parish Relations Committee and the Pastor.
- The Pastor and the Chairperson of the PPRC shall determine if the District Superintendent should be notified.

## 3. Allegations against the Pastor

- The report shall be made to all of the following
  - a. The Chairperson of the SPRC
  - b. The Chairperson of the COS
  - c. The District Superintendent

# Incident Reporting

## B. Responding to Allegations of Abuse:

If it is determined that the allegation has a factual basis, then the following steps shall be taken:

1. A response team shall be formed, and will be assigned to take any further action that is required. The Response Team shall follow the advice of legal counsel and the District Superintendent.
2. The Response Team shall be made up of the Pastor, The Staff Parish Relations Committee Chairperson, the responsible parties of Safe Sanctuary team and the Chairperson of the COS.
3. The Response Team shall appoint one sole media spokesperson. The Response Team shall determine the appropriate means of communicating with the congregation.

# Incident Reporting

## 4. The Response Team will:

- a.** Inform the employee or volunteer of the accusation and discuss the accusations.
- b.** Suspend with pay (for paid employees) the alleged offender while the confidential investigation is being conducted.
- c.** Consult with an attorney for advice regarding compliance with reporting laws – then file the necessary report with the appropriate agency within the time frame required by the State of South Carolina.
- d.** Together with the agency official, meet with the child's parents and, in their presence and with their permission, with the child. Your purpose for meeting is to learn more fully the nature of the allegations, including when and where the alleged offense took place.

Reassure the child that he or she has done nothing wrong and that it was right to report the incident. Allow the child to speak freely. Do not coach responses from them and do not become defensive to any statements.

Seek the truth and protect the child's well-being. If the nature of the alleged abuse is such that any physical injury could have resulted, the child shall be examined immediately by a qualified physician with the parent/guardian permission, if possible. If the physical injury has already been examined by a qualified physician, seek the written report immediately.

# Incident Reporting

e. Notify the liability insurance company immediately. Do not wait for the investigation to be concluded unless your attorney advises you to or wait until criminal charges are filed or until you are faced with a civil suit.

Involving the insurance company early is not an admission of negligence. It is a wise protective measure and may be the means by which legal counsel may be retained to provide a defense for the church and, possibly for the accused. Besides making a coverage determination, the insurance company can also offer advice and assistance in addressing the incident.

f. Cooperate in the investigation conducted by the insurance company, Child Protective Services or any law enforcement entity.

g. Consider the spiritual needs of the accused and seek assistance from the District Superintendent and Conference personnel.

# Congregational Care

We believe that failure to address the issues of suffering, anger, fear, and grief that occur within the church after abuse can have extended and unnecessary consequences for everyone.

We will not hide or shrink away from our responsibility to promptly and appropriately address any incident of abuse.

As a congregation we are committed to the prevention of and termination of behaviors which to contribute to the cycle of abuse.

# Post Reporting Procedure

**First:** Truth telling is the most important component in post-loss recovery. Our communications will be honest, measured, and respectful of all parties involved. Written communication will be factual and will work to dispel rumor or innuendo and to assure the congregation of the efforts taken to secure the safety of the victim and to resume the functions of the ministries and programs with added safeguards.

**Second:** The Pastor may host a planned congregational meeting so that members can attend to learn about the church's response to the allegation of abuse. The meeting will be lead by the Pastor, lay leader(s) and the District Superintendent, and if necessary the Response Team. A non-member Counselor should be available to address attendee questions and feelings.

**Third:** The Safe Sanctuary team will determine how SMUMC will adapt its ongoing ministries to appropriately acknowledge and recover from the incident. Educational programs in various forums should be implemented to promote healing, justice, education and restored worship.

**Fourth:** The Safe Sanctuary team will work closely with the Response Team and clergy to modify any procedures and policies based upon the incident outcome and to diligently engage in every effort to prevent further incidents of abuse and neglect.

# Documentation

## **(Record keeping, Storage and Purging)**

The Safe Sanctuary Ministers will be responsible for maintaining the following documents and ensuring the confidentiality of same:

1. Staff background check
2. Suspicion of incidents
3. Incidence reports
5. Documentation
6. Instructions from law enforcement/Child Protective Services
7. Insurance claims records and correspondence
8. Litigation files and associated documents/correspondence

# Documentation

## **(Record keeping, Storage and Purging)**

Copies will be produced only as required by law, insurance or as deemed appropriate by the Pastor. Documents necessary for employment at SMUMC will be secured by the Chair of the Staff-Parish-Relations Committee in the employment folder for hired workers, vendors, and staff.

Background checks for prospective applicants who are not hired will be destroyed after 180 days. All information acquired during the recruiting of volunteers and employees shall be treated in a confidential manner.

Paid staff records will be destroyed five years after separation from employment.

For volunteer church workers records will be purged after the volunteer has transferred membership or otherwise left the congregation or 24 months after the volunteer's last active participation in a Children's or Youth Program (including music ministries).

Because liability insurance policies are largely written on an occurrence basis, any claims files will be kept indefinitely.

# For more information:

Please contact the church office to be referred to the  
Safe Sanctuary Ministers

(864) 882-2603

[churchoffice@saintmarkumcseneca.org](mailto:churchoffice@saintmarkumcseneca.org)

