

**Safe Sanctuary Policy**  
**Huntsville United Methodist Church/  
Presley Chapel United Methodist Church**  
**Huntsville, Arkansas**

**Purpose**

When a child is baptized or confirmed within our faith, we promise: “With God’s help we will so order our lives after the example of Christ, so 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 . . . .” (Congregational Pledge 2, United Methodist Hymnal, p.44.) The members of this church are committed to providing a safe and nurturing environment for staff, members and guests of all ages, to taking reasonable precautions to reduce the risk of child or adult maltreatment for all who participate in our programs or events, and to reducing the risk of false allegations or suspicions of the same. These guidelines are intended to reflect our congregation’s commitment to preserving the church as a holy place where all people can experience the love of God through relationships with others. This policy applies to all church-sponsored events or programs, whether on or off the church premises.

**I. Selection and Training of Staff and Volunteers**

Before any staff and any volunteer may participate in any church-sponsored event or program that will involve direct contact with children, youth or impaired adults, they must:

Age:

Be at least 21 years of age, unless otherwise approved by the Pastor and Staff Parish Relations Committee.

Application:

Complete and sign an application and related waivers giving permission to check references and background information.

References:

Provide at least three personal references, unrelated to the applicant, and who have known the applicant for at least two years.

Interview:

Provide a personal interview with the Pastor and/or SPRC Representative(s). Applicants for staff positions may also be required to undergo an interview with the Staff Parish Relations Committee or representatives thereof.

Background:

- Undergo a reasonable background check.
- Will include an Arkansas child maltreatment and criminal history.
- Background documents and information will be maintained confidentially.
- Persons listed on the Arkansas child or adult maltreatment or similar registries, or who have criminal convictions of a violent, neglectful, abusive or sexual nature will not be permitted to serve in a capacity involving direct contact with children/youth/impaired adults.

Training:

- Complete Safe Sanctuary Training which will include
- a review of these policies and procedures
- information regarding the nature and indicators of adult and child maltreatment
- education regarding appropriate boundaries, behaviors and practices to reduce the risk of maltreatment
- information regarding Arkansas law dealing with reporting and responding to suspected maltreatment

Agree:

Sign, annually, a statement indicating his or her understanding and agreement to abide by this policy and any related procedures.

Youth:

In addition to the above, youth volunteers who work with children/youth/ impaired adults:

- Will remain under the direct supervision of adult staff and/or volunteers
- Will have no independent supervisory responsibility of others
- Will not be left alone with children, or impaired adults
- Will not be alone with any other staff or volunteer at any time

**II. Interacting with Children, Youth and Impaired Adults**

Whenever a church-sponsored event involves working directly with children, youth or impaired adults, the following will be observed:

Supervision:

No child, youth or impaired adult will be left unsupervised at any time

Two Adults:

- Two unrelated adults will be present at all times; or if it is simply not feasible to do so, one adult will be present with the door open and an adult “floater” will monitor frequently
- When children or impaired adults need restroom assistance, staff and volunteers will not be alone with them in the restroom or stall with the door closed
- Diaper changing will occur at a designated changing table
- One-on-one counseling with children, youth and impaired adults will take place where other adults are immediately available and in a room with an open door and/or in sight of others
- Adult to youth ratio is 1 to 10.

Age:

Adult and youth volunteers must be at least 4 years older than any youth with whom they will be supervising, unless otherwise approved by the Pastor and SPRC Representatives.

Boundaries:

Adults and youth volunteers will respect appropriate physical and emotional boundaries and will refrain from conduct that includes profane or abusive speech, horseplay, threatening or inflicting physical injury, solicitation or completion of sexual conduct or contact; sexually orientated or demeaning humor, photos or comments; the use of alcohol, tobacco, drugs or firearms during the church-sponsored event; and any other behavior that is prohibited by law.

Open Doors:

Any parent or guardian of any child, youth or impaired adult may attend and observe events at any time, unannounced. Other visitors must be escorted by staff or adult volunteers.

Check-in/out:

- Children will be checked into and out of events only by parents, legal guardians or persons authorized to do so by the parent or guardian.
- Youth events will have a pre-determined start and finish time which will be published to the youth's parents/guardians.
- Youth who desire or are required to leave an event before the scheduled ending time of the event MUST have their parent's permission to leave an event before the scheduled ending time. The parent must notify the Youth Pastor/Director or an adult youth leader in writing, giving permission for the youth to leave an event early.
- Youth will sign in and sign out of all events.

Outside Access:

Children, youth and impaired adults will have access to a telephone, cell phone or pager during church sponsored events on or off the facility premises

### Transportation:

During church-sponsored events:

- Drivers must go through the same selection and training process as other staff/volunteers.
- Drivers must be at least 21 years of age.
- Youth will be permitted to drive personal vehicles to off campus church-sponsored events or meet the group at local church-sponsored events only with written permission of parent or guardian.
- Youth will not be permitted to ride to or from off campus church-sponsored events with other youth unless the Youth Pastor/Director is notified in writing by parents and/or guardians of both the driver and the passengers.
- Drivers must have a valid driver's license and proof of insurance.
- Church owned vehicles will be insured.
- Drivers will not transport a non-related child, youth or impaired adult alone, unless prior written approval by parent or guardian is provided.
- Adult volunteers using their personal vehicles to transport youth to and from activities/events will provide a copy of their current auto insurance card and state issued driver's license, which will be maintained on file in the church office.
- Children under the age of 6 or who weigh less than 60 pounds will be restrained in a safety seat.

### Off Campus/Overnight:

During church-sponsored events that take place overnight or off of the church facilities:

- Written permission of a parent/guardian will be obtained prior to the event.
- Parents/guardians will provide contact and medical information, including a copy of their current medical insurance card.
- Parents/guardians will provide medical permission and liability waivers.
- Parents will be provided phone numbers for at least two adult staff members or

**volunteers.**

- One adult may not take one child, youth or impaired adult on overnight or off-campus events alone.
- Males and females will be provided separate sleeping areas.
- Co-ed groups should have both male and female staff/adult volunteers present.
- Whenever possible, adults shall not share the same hotel or cabin with children/youth/impaired adults and at least three persons shall be assigned to each room or cabin.
- Adults will make frequent checks on children, youth and impaired adults or as deemed prudent under the circumstances.
- Adults will not occupy the same sleeping bag or bed with a child/youth/impaired adult with exception of immediate family members.
- All persons will conduct themselves with appropriate modesty including dressing in appropriate locations and wearing suitable sleep attire and swimwear.
- Bikinis are not allowed unless a t-shirt is worn over the bikini top (“Tankinis” are acceptable at church-sponsored water events).

Social Media:

With respect to all church-sponsored events, activities and communications:

- There should be a minimum of two administrators for each social media site.
- All administrators must be adults (minimum 21 years of age).
- Passwords will be protected in a central location. More than one adult should know where this information is located and have access to it.
- There are no privacy rights with respect to Social Media. All conversations and communications should be considered public.
- Staff and volunteers will not post any pictures of comments referencing any child, youth or impaired adult at any church-sponsored event on any internet site including their own personal Facebook page or similar website.

- Staff leadership may post pictures or comments reading children/youth/or impaired adults on the church's Facebook page or website only after obtaining permission from the child/youth/impaired adult's parent or guardian. Photos or comments will not include names such that the person may be so identified.
- Use of social media shall conform to these guidelines as with any other behavior.

### **III. Environment and Resource Use**

#### Location:

- Events will be held in areas of the building or grounds that are suitable for that event
- Children, youth and impaired adults will be discouraged from being present anywhere other than where the event is taking place

#### Doors/Windows:

- Doors: All classroom and office doors will remain open while occupied, or have a window or other visibility from a hallway or other occupied room
- Windows: Windows will be kept free from adornment that may obstruct visibility

#### Outside Groups:

Outside groups wishing to use church facilities must:

- agree, in writing to abide by this church's policy
- and/or agree, in writing, to have comparable policies for the protection of the attendees
- and agree to indemnify, release and hold harmless this church all of its members and staff from any damages resulting from any maltreatment and allegations of same that may occur in association with the outside group's use of church facilities

#### Insurance:

The church will maintain adequate insurance to cover the scope of its ministries

### **IV. Responding to Suspected Maltreatment**

- This congregation will not ignore or tolerate suspected child or adult maltreatment
- This congregation will not require anyone to obtain permission, or to notify anyone at the church before making a child or adult maltreatment report, nor will it prohibit anyone from making a maltreatment report
- This congregation will not retaliate against anyone who makes a maltreatment report
- Anyone may, in good faith, make a hotline report of reasonably suspected child or adult maltreatment

#### Mandatory reporters

- Must immediately report reasonably suspected maltreatment
  - When child or adult maltreatment is reasonably suspected and a report is to be made:
    - Treat the allegation seriously and with respect for all persons involved
    - Immediately make the report, documenting the time and date of call and the name of the person taking the report, to the appropriate hotline:
      - *Arkansas Child Abuse Hotline: 1-800-482-5964*
      - *Arkansas Adult Abuse Hotline: 1-800-482-8049*
1. If the report involves an allegation against staff or a volunteer, or is alleged to have occurred during any church-sponsored event or on church premises, immediately notify the Pastor.
  2. If the suspected maltreatment involves the Pastor, the reporter may instead inform the SPRC chairperson.
  3. Refrain from any attempt to notify or confront the accused or to conduct a personal investigation of the alleged maltreatment, recognizing the capability and authority of the civil authorities to do so.
  4. Maintain the confidentiality of information. All reporters will cooperate fully with all



ADHS, OLTC and/or law enforcement investigations but will not share information with others except the SPRC chair or pastor or their designees as may be appropriate. All inquiries should be directed to the designated church spokesperson to ensure respect for the investigation process and privacy of those involved.

#### **V. Church Participation by Registered Sex Offenders**

- This congregation recognizes that abuse in all of its forms is detrimental. We will provide a safe environment, counsel, and support for the abused. While we deplore the actions of the abuser, we affirm that all persons are in need of God's redeeming love.
- Where a person is known to have previously committed a violent or sexual offense such that he or she is listed on the ACIC Sexual Offender Registry or similar registry maintained by any jurisdiction, he or she will not be permitted to work in direct contact with children, youth or impaired adults.
- The following precautions, in addition to any others deemed necessary by the church and the person previously identified as an offender, will be confidentially maintained for as long as the individual is associated with this congregation
- The Pastor and/or his or her designee will meet with the individual and will openly discuss the conditions that will be placed on the individual
- The individual will covenant in writing with the church community to abide by the conditions of his or her participation
- The conditions of participation will be in writing and signed by the Pastor and the chairperson of the Church Council
- If an individual is on probation or parole, the specific restrictions of probation or parole may be made part of the written conditions of participation.
- The individual may be accompanied by a "Buddy," designated by the church, while the individual is present on church property or is attending any church-sponsored event. The Buddy must agree to remain in the direct visual

presence of the individual at all times.

#### **VI. Review**

This policy will be reviewed and revised if necessary, at least annually, by the Pastor and designated members of the SPRC, Board of Trustees, Safe Sanctuary Committee and any others deemed necessary.

#### **VII. Adopted**

This policy was adopted/ approved at Charge Conference on this \_\_\_\_\_ day of \_\_\_\_\_, 20\_\_.