

INTRODUCTION

“Our Wesleyan heritage calls us as United Methodists to justice and advocacy for those in our communities whose voices are often not heard or overlooked. The realities of the world around us cause us to focus in particular on the children, youth, and vulnerable adults who participate in ministries of the Virginia Conference.”

*“Go out into the roads and lanes, and compel people to come in, so that my house may be filled.”
Luke 14:21 (NRSV)*

“In the Parable of the Great Banquet, Jesus reminds us that God is in the business of inviting all people to the table, where they can be nurtured and transformed to be Christ to others. Today, we continue to recognize that each individual is a child of God and must be allowed to live free of fear, surrounded by love. As Christian adults, we must establish and maintain a nurturing, loving, safe and secure Christian environment, providing support and assistance to our children, youth, and vulnerable adults, remembering that our mandate is not only a responsibility, but an opportunity to protect the gift that God has bestowed upon us.”

*“A new commandment I give you:
Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another.” - John 13:34 (NIV)*

Our Social Principles remind us that:

- “in particular, children must be protected from economic, physical, emotional, and sexual exploitation and abuse.” (2012 *The Book of Discipline of The United Methodist Church*, ¶162.III.C)
- we affirm “the full humanity and personhood” of all individuals with disabilities “as full members of the family of God.” (2012 *Book of Discipline*, ¶162.III.I)
- we “ensure to the aging the respect and dignity that is their right....” (2012 *The Book of Discipline of The United Methodist Church*, ¶162.III.E)

(Policy for the Protection of Children, Youth, and Vulnerable Adults,
Revised and Approved by the Common Table for Church Vitality: Nov. 21, 2013)

STATEMENT OF PURPOSE

Our purpose for the Safe Sanctuaries Policy and Procedures is to demonstrate our commitment to the physical safety and spiritual growth of children, youth and vulnerable adults.

Members of St. Mark's United Methodist Church ("St. Mark's UMC") are committed to providing an environment that is safe for children, youth and vulnerable adults who participate in the activities of the church. We are committed to taking the necessary precautions to protect any person working as a staff member or volunteer from false accusations or suspicions. The following policies and procedures are intended to protect our infants, toddlers, preschoolers, children, youth, vulnerable adults, staff, volunteers, and the entire church body. Staff and volunteers are required to follow these policies and procedures.

This policy will be available in the church office and Narthex, where it is accessible and in a legible form. Any program guide or handbook related the children, youth, or vulnerable adults shall include a written statement of or reference to this policy.

STATEMENT OF COMMITMENT

St. Mark's UMC pledge to conduct the ministry of the gospel in ways that assure the safety and spiritual growth of all children, youth and vulnerable adults as well as of the staff and volunteers.

- We will follow reasonable safety measures in the selection and recruitment of staff/volunteers; We will implement operational procedures in all programs and events;
- We will educate all of our staff/volunteers with children, youth and vulnerable adults regarding the use of all appropriate policies and methods;
- We will have clearly defined procedure for reporting a suspected incident of abuse that conforms to the requirements of state law; and
- We will be prepared to respond to media inquiries if an incident occurs.

CONCLUSION

St. Mark's UMC is committed to demonstrating the love of Jesus Christ so that each child, youth and vulnerable adult 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," United Methodist Hymnal, p.44).

GENERAL CONFERENCE MANDATES

One aspect of fulfilling our baptismal promise to care for children, youth, and vulnerable adults means to “surround these persons with a community of love and forgiveness,…” (The Baptismal Covenant II, *United Methodist Hymnal*) Surrounding these persons means to provide safe sanctuaries where they can be loved and nurtured in the faith.

Our Social Principles remind us that:

- 1) “in particular, children must be protected from economic, physical, emotional, and sexual exploitation and abuse.” (*2012 The Book of Discipline of The United Methodist Church*, ¶162.III.C)
- 2) we affirm “the full humanity and personhood” of all individuals with disabilities “as full members of the family of God.” (*2012 Book of Discipline*, ¶162.III.I)
- 3) we “ensure to the aging the respect and dignity that is their right…” (*2012 The Book of Discipline of The United Methodist Church*, ¶162.III.E)

Clergy and religious professionals have a responsibility to those in their congregations and broader community, especially those whose voice is compromised by age, ability level, and/or abuse or neglect. The 2004 General Conference initially took note of this responsibility when they adopted the statement:

“All clergy of The United Methodist Church are charged to maintain all confidences inviolate, including confessional confidences, except in the cases of suspected child abuse or neglect or in cases where mandatory reporting is required by civil law. (*2012 Book of Discipline*, ¶341.5 page 270)”

Resolution 3084, “Reducing the Risk of Child Sexual Abuse in the Church,” and Resolution 8014, “Church Participation by a Registered Child Sex Offender,” (*2012 Book of Resolutions of the United Methodist Church*, p. 240 and p. 900 respectively) provide guidance to the local church and annual conference as to making our churches safe places, protecting children and other vulnerable persons from abuse.

The *Book of Discipline* (¶1119 – Age-Level, Life-Span, and Family Ministries) provides the following definitions of the age groups covered by this policy.

- Child – persons up to approximately 12 years of age, generally persons from birth through sixth grade
- Youth – persons in the twelve- to eighteen-year-old age group, generally persons in the seventh through twelfth grades
- Adult – persons 18 years of age and older

COMMONWEALTH OF VIRGINIA STATUTES

Because of our commitment to care for all God's children and protect the vulnerable, St. Mark's United Methodist Church activities fully comply with the definitions offered by the Virginia Department of Social Services governing children, youth, and vulnerable adults, along with additional definitions from *Safe Sanctuaries, Reducing the Risk of Abuse in the Church*, 2008, Discipleship Resources, Nashville, TN, Joy Thornburg Melton. (Definitions, Appendix A)

Child and adult protection programs are mandated by statute. The Commonwealth of Virginia's current child abuse reporting statute was first enacted in 1975. Section 63.2-100 has been amended and modified a number of times. The statute is comprehensive, requiring the reporting of numerous types of maltreatment. The law applies to any child under 18 years of age when a parent or any person responsible for the child's care:

- Causes or threatens to cause non-accidental physical or mental injury;
- Has a child present during the manufacture or attempted manufacture of a controlled substance or during the sale of such substance where such activity would constitute a felony violation;
- Neglects or refuses to provide adequate food, clothing, shelter, emotional nurturing, or health care;
- Abandons the child;
- Neglects or refuses to provide adequate supervision in relation to the child's age and level of development;
- Knowingly leaves a child alone in the same dwelling with a person, not related by blood or marriage, who has been convicted of an offense against a minor for which registration is required as a violent sexual offender; or
- Commits or allows to be committed any illegal sexual act upon a child, including incest, rape, indecent exposure, prostitution, or allows a child to be used in any sexually explicit visual material.

An act of child abuse may be committed by any person responsible for the care of another individual who is less than eighteen years of age. It does not matter whether the person caring for the child under the age of 18 is a compensated or a volunteer worker. It does not matter whether the person routinely is entrusted with the care of children or whether such individual only occasionally comes in contact with children. It does not matter whether the person was entrusted with the care of a child for an hour or only a moment. It only matters that a child was abused or neglected by the person who, on the occasion in question, was responsible for the child's care.

Title 63.1 of the *Code of Virginia* establishes a protective services program for persons who are 60 and over and "incapacitated persons ages 18 to 59." Adults with disabilities covered under the *Code* are those "persons who are 18 years or older whose vulnerability is related to impaired physical and/or mental health and/or physical disability." The statutory basis for the program is found in sections 63.1-55.1 through 62.1-55.7 of the *Code of Virginia*.

ST. MARK'S UMC SAFE SANCTUARY COMMITTEE

- Pastor
- Staff Parish Relations Committee

The Safe Sanctuary Committee will meet at least annually to update members on policy or program changes and to verify that the Committee is fulfilling its obligations to the congregation. The Committee may be assembled for emergency purposes at anytime, but as soon as practicable, following any reportable incident and as often as necessary to revise procedures, provide instruction/assistance to clergy, staff or volunteers and to keep members of the congregation properly informed of St. Mark's Safe Sanctuary Policy and Procedure and its ongoing administration. The Committee will also be responsible for coordinating the training for all staff and volunteer workers in these policies and procedures in either verbal or written form.

POLICY INSTRUCTION

All volunteers and paid staff are required to attend policy instruction before working with children, youth and vulnerable adults. In the case that this is not possible, the staff person/volunteer may only serve as an assistant with another trained adult under the stipulation that they attend the next training session or make special arrangements for an overview of the policy with the Safe Sanctuary Committee member. All volunteers and staff are required annually to review this policy, to attend a policy instruction session if available and to sign a new participation statement to be kept on file at the church office.

GENERAL POLICY

Six Month Rule

All Volunteers involved with children/youth/vulnerable adults must have been members of the St. Mark's UMC Congregation for at least six months before beginning a volunteer assignment. Persons not meeting this minimum requirement may serve only as an assistant with another trained Staff/Volunteer. The St. Mark's UMC Safe Sanctuary Committee will consider exceptions to this rule if warranted.

On-Campus Policies - Doors to rooms shall be kept open or, in the case of rooms with Dutch doors, the top half shall be kept open. Under NO circumstances shall a Worker be alone with a child/youth/vulnerable adult behind a closed door with no window. Doors shall never be locked while occupied by staff/volunteers, unless such doors are of the "Dutch Door" variety and the top portion of the doors are left completely open. Classes shall remain in the assigned room location. If there is a change of location, a sign shall be posted on the door providing notice.

No child/youth/vulnerable adult will be left unsupervised while attending a St. Mark's-sponsored activity/ministry. Parents/Guardians of children, youth and vulnerable adult will be asked to read and sign the Emergency Care Information Form (Appendix B) to participate in the ministries at St. Mark's UMC. Youth will be asked to read and sign the Youth Covenant of Conduct Form

(Appendix C) to participate in youth ministry activities. In the event that child care services are not provided by St. Mark's for a St. Mark's- sponsored activity/ministry (i.e. retreats, small groups, worship services, etc.), the parent or guardian shall be fully responsible for the supervision of the child/youth/vulnerable adult during the event. Said child/youth/vulnerable adult shall remain in the presence of the parent or guardian, and at no time be left alone and unsupervised. Should the parent or guardian arrange for their own child/youth/vulnerable adult (s) care/supervision within the St. Mark's facility, said child/youth/vulnerable adult supervision shall be in compliance with the Safe Sanctuary Policy and Procedures. If parents/guardians refuse to comply with Safe Sanctuary Policy and Procedures, they and their child/youth/vulnerable adult will be asked to leave.

When possible, a child, youth or vulnerable adult will be encouraged to take care of their own bathroom needs. Should a child, youth or vulnerable adult require assistance, the outer bathroom door will remain open.

Off-Site Policies - Persons coordinating off-site activities will assure every participant has completed the appropriate forms and will take copies of these forms along on the event in a folder marked "Emergency Forms". For outdoor programs or programs that occur in a non-traditional setting which makes supervision challenging, the staff/volunteers(s) in charge of the activity shall take extra appropriate measures to ensure that the setting is free of obvious safety hazards and suits the activity while properly supervising child/youth/vulnerable adult.

Residential Events: Any overnight event is classified as residential. In residential settings, overnight supervision must always be by adults of the same sex as the participants. Adults shall not share the same bed with a child or youth under any circumstances. Participant to supervision ratios as addressed previously should be followed.

Discipline - The behavior of a child/youth/vulnerable adult who is a constant disruption shall be discussed with his or her parents/ legal guardian. Parents/legal-guardian shall be asked to attend the Ministry to observe or control the problem behavior. The staff or volunteer shall remove a child, youth or vulnerable adult who is disruptive or a danger to himself/herself or others immediately and the parents/legal guardian and the Pastor and Chairperson of Staff Parish Relations Committee shall be promptly notified.

Communication with Parents/Legal Guardians - Workers should attempt to keep open lines of communication with parents or legal guardians. Parents or legal guardians shall always be permitted to observe in a classroom. Parents or legal guardians shall be advised that they must pick up their respective child, youth or vulnerable adult at the appropriate ending time when the Ministry is over unless special arrangements have been made with the staff or volunteers concerned. A signed Emergency Care Information Form (Appendix B) shall be obtained for each child, youth or vulnerable adult in order to participate in any Ministry. A signed Permission Form (Appendix L) shall be obtained for each child, youth or vulnerable adult in order to participate in any off-campus Ministry.

Additional Policies for Ministries of Infants, Toddlers and Pre-Schoolers - Parents must sign in when leaving an infant in the Nursery. Parents of toddlers and preschoolers must sign their child in upon arrival and out when leaving. Parents shall provide the staff or volunteer, Pastor and/or Chairperson of Staff Parish Relations Committee with any special information regarding a possible child custody dispute where staff/volunteer shall pay particular attention to who picks up the child.

Additional Polices for Ministries of Children – Kindergarten through Fifth Grade Ministry participants will be released from the classroom when a parent/guardian picks them up. Youth grades may be released from Sunday School by the staff or volunteers without being picked up by a parent or other designated person. The church office shall maintain a student information file with a copy given to the teachers. This file shall contain a listing of the students enrolled in the Ministry with references or remarks as to any parent instructions or special information regarding a child in such Ministry.

POLICY REVIEW

The St. Mark's UMC "**Safe Sanctuary Policy and Procedure**" for the protection of children, youth, and vulnerable adults shall be reviewed every three years and approved by the Administrative Council. This policy is available to church members and copies will be kept in the church office, Narthex and on file at the District Conference.

PROCEDURES

(Direct Oversight and Care for Children, Youth, and Vulnerable Adults) Application and Screening Procedures for Staff and Volunteers

Definitions of Key Terms

It is important to have a common understanding of key terms in this policy. (Appendix A)

Age Requirement: All volunteers must be at least 16 years of age. Volunteers under the age of 18 must work with and under the supervision of an adult volunteer. Youth volunteers (under the age of 18) must have signed parental permission on the Safe Sanctuary Policy Volunteer Agreement (Appendix D) before they can be authorized to serve with children, youth, and/or vulnerable adults. Assistants must be a minimum of 12 years of age; and in the judgment of a St. Mark's UMC staff/volunteer, competent to assist in the activity.

SCREENING PROCEDURES

An essential component of preventing abuse by staff, volunteers and assistants is careful screening. It will be the responsibility of the Pastor and the Chairperson of Staff Parish Relations Committee to ensure the following steps are followed.

The following steps are used for screening staff, volunteer and paid applicants:

A. Complete a Volunteer Agreement (Appendix D), the Volunteer/Staff Application (Appendix E), and the Participation Covenant Statement (Appendix F).

A completed Volunteer Agreement, the Volunteer/Staff Application and the Participation Covenant will be required for Volunteers, Assistants and all employees and will be kept on file in the church office.

B. Conduct an interview with applicants.

An interview will be conducted with all paid applicants.

C. Complete Reference Checks.

A minimum of two references must be contacted on all paid applicants and recorded on the Record of Contact. (Appendix G)

D. Complete Background Checks

A Criminal Records Screenings (Appendix H) must be completed for all volunteers and all paid applicants, which include, but are not limited to:

VA State Police Criminal History Report

VA Child Abuse History Clearance

FBI Criminal History Report

The background checks will be initiated and seen only by the Pastor and Chairperson for the Staff Parish Relations Committee. Only concerns will be reported to the Pastor who in turn will decide how the situation will be handled. All personnel forms and confidential information will be maintained in a secure location under the supervision of the Pastor. All emergency contact information for staff, children, and youth will be accessible to designated church leaders for use in emergency situations.

Persons having a Criminal History of any of the following types of offenses shall not be allowed to serve in any Ministry:

- Child abuse, whether physical, emotional, sexual or neglectful
- Violent offenses, including murder, rape, assault, domestic violence, etc.
- Other offenses, depending on how recent, the frequency and nature may also preclude an applicant or Worker from serving in a Ministry. This will be determined on a case-by-case basis by the Pastor.
- Lying on an application may result in removal from service in a Ministry.

Workers who refuse to comply with this policy or repeatedly fail to follow it shall be subject to dismissal. Workers who do not attend mandatory training are subject to dismissal. Persons may begin working in a Ministry when the application paperwork and background checks are complete and the person is found to meet the acceptance standards.

Record Keeping: The leader for all church functions involving children, youth, and vulnerable adults should keep an attendance list. Date and names of all participating should be recorded. A written Incident Report Form (Appendix I), shall be prepared by the leader whenever an injury or incident occurs during a function. The report will be forwarded to the Pastor and church administrative secretary for filing.

Results of Record Check and Search/Refusal to Complete Screening Procedures: No volunteer will be allowed to serve: (a) until the individual has met all of his/her obligations as set forth in this Policy; (b) if it is determined the individual has a pending charge of, has been convicted of, or has pled guilty to a charge of sexual misconduct, child abuse, molestation, neglect, or other violent misconduct, including but not limited to those offenses set forth in Section 63.1-198.1 of the *Code of Virginia*; or (c) if the individual refuses to participate in any part of the screening procedures set forth in this Policy.

The *Code of Virginia* prohibits individuals with certain barrier offenses as defined in Section 63.2-1719 from working with children, youth, and vulnerable adults in regulated and licensed programs. St. Mark's UMC adheres to these same requirements for volunteers in any capacity that involves direct contact with or supervision of children, youth or vulnerable adults. Applicants and volunteers who have been identified as having committed sexual or physical abuse or having a criminal record involving violent crime to another person will not knowingly be employed for service or accepted as a volunteer with programs or activities for children, youth, and/or vulnerable adults. A list of barrier offenses/crimes can be found on the internet at: http://www.vdh.virginia.gov/OLC/Laws/documents/barrier_crimes_guide.pdf

Under the law, convictions for offenses unrelated to abuse or neglect would not disqualify an applicant for employment or service. Even if the applicant has been convicted of a barrier crime, it may not always prevent employment or service. An applicant who has one misdemeanor conviction specified in the law may serve or be hired if:

- The criminal offense did NOT involve abuse or neglect; AND
- Five years have lapsed since the conviction occurred.

The Safe Sanctuary Committee will review the findings.

Procedure for Responding to Discovery of Registered Sex Offenders

- The Pastor and Chairperson for Staff Parish Committee shall be notified upon discovery of a registered sex offender who is currently attending church and/or church sponsored activities.
- The participation of the offender in all activities in which that person volunteers or works with children and/or youth will be immediately suspended.
- The Pastor and Chairperson for Staff Parish Relations Committee will establish appropriate boundaries to ensure the continued safety of children and youth at the church while allowing some measure of appropriate participation for the offender.
- To participate in any church-sponsored activity, including, but not limited to continued worship and/or membership in the church, the offender shall read and sign the Covenant Letter for Registered Sex Offender (Appendix J) which shall include provisions consistent with this Policy as determined necessary by the Pastor and Chairperson for Staff Parish Relations Committee for the protection of children and/or youth.
- The Pastor and Chairperson for the Staff Parish Relations Committee may, but is not required to, inform the congregation that a registered sex offender is currently attending church and/or church-sponsored activities. Any communication to the congregation may

reveal the identity of the offender, and the registered sex offender shall be made aware that anonymity is not guaranteed.

Violations of Procedures/Internal Investigation:

- Staff/Volunteers must notify the Pastor of any activity undertaken on their own behalf or by others, which violates this Policy.
- Any Staff/Volunteer who is subject to an investigation of suspected child abuse or molestation will be suspended from his/her position pending completion of an investigation.
- Harassment of individual associated with said incident will be reported as soon as discovered to the Pastor/Chairperson for the Staff Parish Relations Committee.

Participant Supervision

Adequate supervision of children, youth, and vulnerable adults will be provided by staff and volunteers during a St. Mark's UMC-sponsored event or activity.

Two Adult Rule: Leaders will be assigned in teams of two or more for all children or youth activities. These two leaders will be unrelated adults age 18 or older and at least 5 years older than the children and youth they supervise. When the "Two Adult Rule" is not feasible, a "floater" with visual and physical access to all areas will be required to check off visits on the Observation Form (See Appendix K) every 15 minutes. While recognizing the importance of developing youth leaders, we must also recognize that persons 18 and under are considered youth and not adults. Therefore, when youth assist with an activity, the youth may not be counted toward fulfilling the "Two Adult Rule."

While mentoring and counseling are encouraged and supported, adults and authority figures should take every precaution to avoid being alone with a child or youth in inaccessible areas. This can include, but is not limited to:

- An automobile while taking a child home
- A classroom with windowless/locked doors
- A cabin at camp

If a child, youth or vulnerable adult requests to speak privately with an Adult, the Adult will ensure that he/she and the person are visible to others while talking, even though they may not be heard. When a legal adult has mental challenges that place him/her in a vulnerable position, or is elderly or disabled who might not be able to escape potential abuse, the two-person rule shall apply.

Participant to Supervisor Ratios: Adequate supervision will be provided at all times during programs and events sponsored by St. Mark's UMC. The following are minimum guidelines, but all ratios shall fall into compliance with the "Two Adult Rule."

- One adult to three children, 0 to 12 months of age
- One adult to four children, ages 12 to 24 months
- One adult to six children, ages 24 months to 36 months
- One adult to eight children, youth, and/or vulnerable adults ages 3 to 17 years

The following ratios should be considered as a guide for participants with physical and intellectual disabilities:

- Participants needing individual assistance or supervision – 1 leader to 1 child/youth/adult
- Needing close assistance or supervision – 1 leader to 2 children/youth/adults
- Needing occasional assistance – 1 leader to 4 children/youth/adults
- Needing minimal assistance – 1 leader to 5 children/youth/adults

The specific needs of individual children, youth, or vulnerable adults may require a change to these guidelines. To the extent reasonably possible, adult leadership should be gender balanced in approximately the same proportion as the participant group.

Acknowledgment of Responsibility to Contact Parents and/or Necessary Officials: When necessary, the Pastor and/or Chairperson of Staff Parish Relations Committee will contact the parents or legal guardians of children/youth/vulnerable adults to discuss the participation of the individual in St. Mark's UMC programs. Staff and volunteers will, as necessary, seek the assistance of parents and legal guardians concerning behavioral problems. The Pastor and/or Chairperson of Staff Parish Relations Committee reserves the right, in emergency situations, to contact area police or rescue personnel in order to protect the safety and well-being of all those participating in St. Mark's UMC-sponsored activities.

Transportation to Off-Site Activities: When transporting participants to off-site activities, no automobile will contain only one adult (driver) and one child/youth/vulnerable adult. Automobiles will contain either one driver and two or more participants or two adults and any number of child/youth/vulnerable adults (within the seat belt limitations of the vehicle, whereas seatbelts are ALWAYS required). If there is an extenuating circumstance causing only one adult and one child/youth/vulnerable adult to travel together in an automobile, permission must be obtained by a parent or legal guardian of the child/youth/vulnerable adult. This permission should be written and signed by the parent/guardian or documented by the volunteer if only verbal consent is obtainable. In addition:

- It is understood that the adult driving the child must have undergone a background check including a motor vehicle record check.
- Use of child safety seats, which meet federal standards is required for children under six (6) years of age. Drivers and passengers must also follow airbag age/weight regulations per specific vehicle guidelines.
- Under no circumstances should anyone under the age of 21 be allowed to drive children, youth, or vulnerable adults *during* an event.
- No consumption of alcohol or use of other drugs at any time by a driver or passenger while traveling to, from, or during a St. Mark's UMC sponsored event (unless medication is medically necessary for the health and safety of the driver and/or passenger).
- Driver of the vehicle should refrain from cell phone use while driving.

Release at End of Event: Supervision will be provided following a St. Mark's UMC-sponsored event or activity until all persons are in the care and custody of a parent, a legal guardian or other

individual designated in writing by the parent/guardian. No participant will be released to anyone other than the parent or legal guardian or approved chaperone, unless prior written permission has been granted by the parent or legal guardian. Sign-out procedures should be established to assure that participants are released only to known, designated individuals.

Emergency Situations: In order to respond reasonably and responsibly to an emergency situation, including but not limited to a medical crisis involving a child/youth/vulnerable adult, the (Pastor and/or Chairperson for Staff Parish Relations Committee) may find that adherence to the procedures set forth in this Policy is either impossible or, based upon the reasonable judgment of the staff member or volunteer, not in the best interests of an individual. Under such circumstances, adherence to this Policy will not be required.

Inadvertent Failures to Follow Policy: St. Mark's UMC recognizes that in our active ministries to children/youth/vulnerable adults, occasionally, a staff member or volunteer will find it necessary to care for an individual without the assistance of another volunteer or staff member. Failure to follow this Policy on a routine, unnecessary or unjustified basis will not be permitted.

Building Safety Guidelines

Prevention Measures: Be alert to any potential causes for accidents, injuries, or fire in your area and during your event. If repairs are needed in an area, (frayed cord, broken chairs/tables, water on the floor, etc.) notify the Chairperson of Trustees. The building, grounds, and equipment must be maintained in order to protect the safety of all.

First-Aid: First-Aid supplies will be available on site in a designated location. Group leaders will have copies of and access to children, youth, and adult participants emergency information at all times. The originals are to be filed in a designated location at the church. In the event of an accident, injury or medical emergency, first aid shall be administered as soon as possible and an Incident Report (Appendix I) will be completed and submitted to the Pastor. If necessary, 911 shall be called for local emergency services to respond. The Emergency Care Information Form (Appendix B) will be on file granting permission for a child's emergency medical care. If a child/youth arrives ill, they will not be permitted to participate in the ministry event. If a child/youth becomes ill (fever, vomiting, etc.) during a ministry event, the parent/guardian shall be contacted and asked to pick up their child/youth. These steps shall be followed when providing first-aid that involves cleaning an open wound, bleeding cut, or examining the mouth:

- Wear disposable gloves
- Wash hands before and after administering aid
- Use care in disposing of trash. Place refuse that contains body fluids or blood in a sealed plastic bag and place in a trashcan with a plastic liner.
- Clean the area with a disinfectant spray.

Incident Response: After First-Aid has been administered and the injured person has been cared for, complete an Incident Report (Appendix I) and notify the Pastor and the Chairperson of the Staff Parish Relations Committee, who will follow through with any additional actions to be taken.

Fire Evacuation and Response: Fire evacuation plans shall be posted in each room. Volunteers shall be trained to understand evacuation procedures and locations of fire alarms, extinguishers and flashlights in the event of electrical failure. In the event of a fire, the first priority is to ensure the safety of all persons in your care. Secondly, pull the fire alarm or dial 911. Only if it is safe to do so, then attempt to contain the fire by shutting door or using fire extinguisher. Evacuation plans shall be reviewed with children and youth periodically.

Automobile Incident Response: In the event of an automobile accident during a ministry event, the driver shall first ensure the safety of all passengers; administer first-aid and/or call 911 for emergency services as necessary. After assuring that the situation is safe, the driver shall notify the person in charge of the ministry event and complete an Accident/Incident Report. The person shall contact the Pastor and the Chairperson for the Staff Parish Relations Committee. The Pastor and/or Chairperson for the Staff Parish Relations Committee shall notify the parents/guardians promptly.

Guidelines for Parents

- All children through 5th grade are to be escorted to and from group activities/classes by an authorized parent/guardian or responsible adult.
- Parents/guardians are encouraged to have children use the restroom with parental supervision prior to the start of the activity.
- Parents/guardians should make sure that staff/volunteers have information necessary to properly protect and supervise their child in all situations likely to arise based upon the length of the activity and its location. This specifically includes notifying about any medical, psychological, behavioral, child custody or similar issues. Notations should be made as to allergies or special restrictions on snacks. Parents should understand that not all activities are appropriate for all children. It is the parent's responsibility to make sure the Adult in Charge is physically present for an event before leaving. Children are expected to abide by any rules or conditions for any activity in order to participate.
- Parents/guardians must complete a Permission Form (Appendix L) in order to participate in off campus activities. An Emergency Care Information Form (Appendix B) must be on file.
- To ensure Internet safety for our children, no names will be used on the St. Mark's UMC website or Facebook page. Permission must be granted by a parent/guardian for the use of children/youth photos on any advertisement.
- Children attending a church-sponsored event may not leave prior to the ending of that event without previous contact between the parents and the coordinator in charge.

- Children not attending Sunday School or an event are the responsibility of their parent/guardian and must be attended by parent/guardian. Children must be supervised at all times while on church property.

POLICES APPLICABLE TO OUTSIDE ORGANIZATIONS

St. Mark's UMC support Cub and Boy Scout groups. All leaders must meet the requirements and adhere to the requirements of the Boy Scouts of America guidelines, which meet this Safe Sanctuary Policy and Procedures.

Any outside organization, group(s) or individual(s) who use the facilities of St. Mark's UMC, shall be provided with the St. Mark's Safe Sanctuary Policy and Procedures and are expected to read and follow as appropriate for the Organization's activity.

Procedures for Reporting Inappropriate Behavior or Abuse and Behavior Giving Rise to a Suspicion of Abuse or Neglect

Those who observe others' inappropriate behavior are always very troubled by what they have seen and often have questions regarding the appropriate course of action to take.

These procedures set forth are designed to:

- provide reassurance to those that have observed such behavior, by setting forth the appropriate actions to be taken;
- establish procedures that are in accordance with the statutes of the Commonwealth of Virginia; and
- establish procedures that are in accordance with the notification requirements promulgated by the 1992 General Conference of The United Methodist Church and the Virginia Conference Policy on Sexual Misconduct.

Statutory Obligation to Report

Certain persons who suspect that a child, youth, or vulnerable adult is abused, neglected, or exploited are required to report what they suspect to the Virginia Department of Social Services.

- The Virginia Annual Conference expects that when United Methodist clergy and religious professionals of the Virginia Conference become aware of suspected child abuse or neglect, they will insure that a report to Child Protective Services will be made. When a Virginia United Methodist Conference clergy person or religious professional has completed a conference workshop on "*Clergy and the Reporting of Suspected Abuse or Neglect*" they become mandated reporters of suspected child abuse in the Commonwealth of Virginia. Clergy can make reports themselves, anonymously if desired.
- Section 63.1-248.3 of the *Code of Virginia* requires "[a]ny teacher or other person employed in a public or private school, kindergarten, or nursery school, any person

providing full-time or part-time child care for pay on a regular planned basis . . . and any person associated with or employed by any private organization responsible for the care, custody, or control of children who has reason to suspect that a child is abused or neglected, to report the matter immediately . . . to the local department of the county or city wherein the child resides or wherein the abuse or neglect is believed to have occurred or to the Department of Social Services' toll-free child abuse and neglect hotline."

- Other professionals who hold specific licenses and certifications validated by the Commonwealth of Virginia are also mandated reporters.

In addition, although not required by law to do so, anyone else who knows or reasonably suspects abuse of a child, youth, or vulnerable adult may choose to report such suspected abuse immediately. All reports of child abuse are confidential and will be investigated. The person making such a report cannot be held liable for making the report, unless it is proven that the person acted in bad faith or with malicious intent.

Reports may be made by calling the local Department of Social Services or the following hotlines, which are open 24 hours a day/7 days a week:

Children/Youth 1-800-552-7096

Adults 1-888-83-ADULT

State and local officials will require the following information:

- Name and address of the child/youth/vulnerable adult;
- Age of the child/youth/vulnerable adult;
- Names and address of the parent or caregiver;
- Name of the one who suspects the child/youth/vulnerable adult is being abused or neglected
- Any other helpful information

The reporter may choose to remain anonymous. If the reporter gives his or her name, it will remain confidential unless otherwise ordered by a court. Following notification, the matter will be transferred to the appropriate local Child or Adult Protective Service (C/APS) unit.

"Reasonable Suspicion"

In accordance with Section 63.1-248.3 of the *Code of Virginia* (1950), all staff and volunteers should report any behavior that, "in [his or her] professional or official capacity, leads the individual [to] have reason to suspect that a child is an abused or neglected child." Staff and volunteers should report even if they lack certainty that an individual has been abused. Neither the law nor The United Methodist Church requires an individual to know, with certainty, or to confirm that an individual has been abused prior to notifying appropriate officials. Moreover, investigating whether an individual has or has not been abused and ultimately whether a report of suspected abuse is, in fact, based upon actual abuse is a matter to be resolved by local and state professionals.

Virginia statutes simply require individuals to report their own suspicions. Such suspicions can be very well founded, i.e., based upon behavior that would lead any reasonable person to suspect child abuse, even though ultimately local or state professionals determine that no child abuse has occurred. Moreover, Virginia law protects those that report suspicious behavior that is found not to be associated with or involve child abuse. An individual who reports suspected child abuse, or participates in a judicial proceeding resulting from such a report is, under Virginia law, immune from any civil or criminal liability in connection with the report or participation. The only requirement for such immunity is that the individual reporting or participating in the judicial proceeding cannot be proven to "have acted in bad faith or with malicious intent." In other words, staff and volunteers cannot be held liable for notifying officials regarding suspected abuse if the person reporting the behavior honestly suspects that an individual has been abused.

Suspicion of Abuse: If the staff member or volunteer believes that the child/youth/vulnerable adult that is the subject of his or her suspicions is in danger, immediate steps must be taken to protect the health, welfare, and well-being of the individual.

Inappropriate Behavior: Certain behavior, while inappropriate, does not lead a reasonable person to suspect that a child has been or is currently being abused; therefore, does not require notification of local or state officials or church officials. Nevertheless, such behavior must be addressed in a timely manner in order to protect children/youth/vulnerable adults. Any inappropriate language or conduct between staff or volunteers and a child/youth/vulnerable adult should be discussed with the appropriate staff member or volunteer who is responsible for administration and/or coordination of the activity in which the individual is participating.

Inappropriate conduct includes, but is not limited to, any action that violates:

- Virginia law;
- this or any other written policy of St. Mark's UMC, or
- any written policy of the General Conference of The United Methodist Church or the Virginia Conference of The United Methodist Church

If either the observer or the individual to whom such behavior was reported, upon reflection, determines that the behavior is not only inappropriate, but also gives rise to a suspicion of child abuse, the procedures for reporting such behavior to church and state officials shall be followed.

Any reported behavior that is of a very serious nature, although not giving rise to a suspicion of child abuse, shall be brought to the attention of the St. Mark's UMC staff member or volunteer in charge of the event who shall participate in all meetings with the individual involved in the misconduct. When appropriate, prompt warnings shall be issued and remedial actions shall be taken.

Reporting Procedures

All allegations of improper conduct involving children, youth, and/or vulnerable adults will be taken seriously and dealt with in a timely manner, according to state law. All reporting of allegations of misconduct during a St. Mark's UMC event will be handled as confidentially as circumstances reasonably permit.

Abuse of a Child, Youth, and/or Vulnerable Adult

If an allegation of misconduct occurs, all necessary information will be gathered in an appropriate manner. It is important that staff/volunteers adhere to all the procedures listed below. However, circumstances and seriousness of the incident may impact the order in which the procedures are followed.

- If needed, emergency medical care should be provided.
- Staff or volunteer will take the child/youth/vulnerable adults to another staff or volunteer, preferably a person in a leadership role in the event.
- Immediately notify the appropriate St. Mark's UMC staff member and/or the volunteer responsible for coordinating the activity in which the individual is participating.
- The staff or volunteer ministry leader must immediately begin to document an Incident Report Form (Appendix I) with the relevant facts and observations. The incident form shall be given to the Pastor or Chairperson of Staff Parish Relations Committee to respond to the action.
- The Pastor and Chairperson of Staff Parish Relations Committee shall be the designated persons to receive reports of alleged abuse of children, youth or vulnerable adults. The Pastor or Chairperson of Staff Parish Relations Committee shall contact the District Superintendent immediately upon determining that a reportable incident has occurred or immediately following a report to state officials.
- If the incident or behavior to be reported involves either of the persons to whom the report would ordinarily be made in accordance with this section, the individual observing the suspicious behavior shall report the incident to at least two current members of the Staff Parish Relations Committee within 24 hours.
- Any person who observes or suspects abuse of a child, youth, and/or vulnerable adult shall report it to the following hotline phone number (1 800 552-7096) available 24 hours per day, 7 days a week or to their local law enforcement agency.
- It is important that all parties be sensitive to the alleged victim and his or her family as well as to the accused. Pastoral care should be available to all in the time of crisis. Referrals will be made as appropriate, to local agencies for supportive services to the child, families, and legal guardians of the victim.
- Alleged perpetrator(s) should be immediately removed from the event.
- Event staff or volunteers will ensure that appropriate care is given to others who may have knowledge of or be affected by the incident.
- Following notification of the appropriate persons, the Pastor and/or Chairperson of the Staff Parish Relations Committee shall notify the parents/guardians of the child/youth/vulnerable adult.

Sexual Abuse, Misconduct, or Harassment

Sexual harassment, sexual misconduct, and sexual abuse all violate the integrity of the individuals involved and are prohibited in our congregation and ministries. No person has the right to violate a person physically or emotionally. Anyone who violates this policy will be held accountable for his or her actions according to the church and civil laws.

When any church member, ministry participant, staff member or clergy person observes or hears of any inappropriate sexualized behavior occurring on church premises or in connection with any church ministry or sanctioned church activity (regardless of location), it is to be reported immediately to the Pastor and the Chairperson of Staff Parish Relations Committee.

Duty to Report: Any church member, ministry leader/participant, staff member or clergy person who observes or is informed that a crime may have been committed (e.g. rape, minor involved, sexual abuse or any other law which may have been violated) has the responsibility to call the police immediately and inform the Pastor and the Chairperson of the Staff Parish Relations Committee. The only exception to this duty to report is if the information was conveyed to the clergy person in a privileged communication that would be protected from disclosure by the clergy-penitent privilege. In this case, the clergy person shall consult with the district superintendent about whether reporting is appropriate.

When the Pastor or Chairperson of the Staff Parish Relations Committee receives a report of sexual abuse, misconduct, or harassment, either church-related or civil, he or she is to contact the District Superintendent immediately (within no more than 8 hours). The District Superintendent will provide direction on how to handle the situation immediately, including the protocol for investigation and response to the report.

Other Required Procedures

Documentation: All conversations and actions shall be documented in writing.

Discussion and Publicity: Discussion concerning the reported incident or behavior will not be held except:

- Between the individual reporting the behavior and the individual to whom the behavior was reported,
- Appropriate supervisory authorities,
- The parents/guardians of the involved individual unless the parents or others in the home are suspected of abusing the individual, and
- State or local officials. No outside media shall be contacted and no statements generated other than by the Pastor/District Superintendent or Director of Communications of the Virginia Conference. Every effort will be made to protect the identity of the child/youth/vulnerable adult and those accused of and those reporting the suspicious behavior or incident.

Confrontation of Accused: No one shall confront the accused with the allegations unless and until advised by state or local authorities and/or Conference officials. The accused shall be relieved temporarily of event duties pending completion of investigation by the Pastor, Conference and/or state and local officials.

Care for the Victims: The Pastor and/or Chair of Staff Parish Relations Committee and

Conference shall extend whatever care and resources are deemed necessary to comfort both the victims of the abuse and their families and the accused and his or her family.

Insurance Carrier: The allegations will be reported to the St. Mark's UMC insurance carrier following notification of the Conference officials.

Media Communications: The Pastor and/or his/her designee are the only persons authorized to make statements to representatives of the media. All requests for statements should be directed to the Pastor.

Exceptions to the Policy

Individuals participating in St. Mark's UMC ministry to children, youth, and/or vulnerable adults as speakers, short-term presenters, facilitators, or performers **will not** be screened in accordance with the procedures set forth above. Pursuant to this Policy, individuals participating as speakers, short-term presenters, facilitators, and performers will not be left alone with any child, youth, and/or vulnerable adults participating in a St. Mark's UMC-sponsored activity.

AMENDMENT TO POLICY

This policy may be amended as needed and approved by the Staff Parish Relations Committee and the Administrative Board.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Policy for the Protection of Children, Youth, and Vulnerable Adults, Revised and Approved by the Common Table for Church Vitality: Nov. 21, 2013

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Safe Sanctuaries Policy and Procedures Children's Ministry, Griffin First United Methodist Church, Griffin, GA. www.griffin-fmc.org

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