

Covenant of Care

Policies and Procedures



GLOBAL
METHODIST CHURCH
SOUTH GEORGIA

Dear Friends,

Jesus said, “Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these.”
Matthew 19:14

As with many areas of church work, the ministries of children/youth and vulnerable adults rely heavily on the dedication of loving, trustworthy adult volunteer leaders. Safeguards must be in place in recruiting, training, and maintaining a team of adult leaders to disciple the youngest of our congregation. It is our prayer that this document serves as a compass for how we care for such populations.

Our Lord and Savior Jesus said it best in the scripture above. In this Ministry Safety Plan, you will see how we, as St. Marys Methodist Church intend to live that out.

Seeking Him,
St. Marys Methodist Family Ministry Staff

GLOBAL METHODIST CHURCH
SOUTH GEORGIA

St. Marys Methodist Church
Covenant of Care Policies & Procedures

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GLOBAL METHODIST CHURCH
SOUTH GEORGIA

Definitions

SGA GMC — the South Georgia Annual Conference of the Global Methodist Church.

St. Marys Methodist Church — a South Georgia Global Methodist Church.

Volunteer — any person 16 years of age or older who assists in the conduct of activities for children, youth, or developmentally disabled adults under the supervision of a ministry area leader. **Adult volunteers** are volunteers 18 years of age or older. Volunteers under 18 may be restricted or have additional requirements depending on the position or area.

Ministry Director/Supervisor — a lead volunteer or staff member of the church who oversees a specific ministry of the church. The person with direct responsibility for the ministry area.

Covenant of Care Committee — a committee tasked with the responsibility of the local church's Children's, Youth, and Vulnerable Adult Ministries to carry out appropriate Ministry activities while safeguarding program participants against emotional, physical, or sexual abuse. This responsibility may be served by an administrative committee of the church.

Covenant of Care — the SGA GMC policy to protect children, youth, and vulnerable adults.

MinistrySafe — the commercial entity providing powerful tools to manage volunteers and staff for compliance, background checks, and training videos.

Overview of the St. Marys Methodist Church Covenant of Care

Because we love children and youth and desire to protect them, the St. Marys Methodist Church seeks to ensure staff members and volunteers working with children or youth (and other vulnerable populations) ~~at a minimum must~~ complete **FOUR SAFETY STEPS** before ministry work or volunteer placements begin.

STEP ONE: Court Mandated Reporter Neglect, Sexual Abuse, Physical Abuse, and Emotional Abuse Awareness Training
St. Marys Methodist Church requires that all staff members and volunteers avoid abusive behavior of any kind. Staff members and volunteers are required to report any policy violations to a supervisor or member of the Covenant of Care Committee.

Abuse awareness Training is to be completed prior to serving and to be renewed every three years, with a yearly refresher training for all serving in children's, youth and vulnerable population ministries. A brief definition of abuse and neglect is listed below. Volunteers and staff will complete more detailed training on abuse awareness and ministry policy separate from this document.

Who Is a Mandated Reporter?
Under Georgia Code § 19-7-5, certain individuals are required to report suspected child abuse when they have reasonable cause to believe abuse has occurred.

Neglect
Definition: Failure of a parent, guardian, or caregiver to provide for a child's basic needs.

Sexual Abuse
Definition: Sexual activity or behavior involving a child for another person's sexual gratification.

Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children
Definition: Sexual activity involving a child in exchange for something of value, or treating a child as a commercial sexual object.

Physical Abuse
Definition: Non-accidental physical injury to a child.

Emotional Abuse
Definition: A pattern of behavior that damages a child's emotional development or sense of self-worth.

STEP TWO: Screening Process
Staff members and volunteers are required to complete the *Covenant of Care* Screening Process, which includes:

- Employment Application (staff members only)
- Face-to-Face Meeting (volunteers) or Interview (staff members)
- Reference Check

**A volunteer must attend a SGA GMC church for six months or be known by a staff member for at least 6 months before being eligible to serve in positions providing access to children, youth, or vulnerable populations.*

STEP THREE: Policies & Procedures
All staff members and volunteers are required to review the policies contained in this manual and sign the last page of this policy, indicating that he or she has read and understood the material and agrees to comply with policy requirements.

STEP FOUR: Background Check
St. Marys Methodist Church requires that all staff members and volunteers working or volunteering in children or youth activities or programming undergo a Background Check through *MinistrySafe*. Depending upon position, differing levels or intensity of Background Check may be required. Individuals who have committed sexually oriented or sex-related crimes may not serve in any area providing services to children, youth, or vulnerable adults. In addition, certain other past criminal acts *may* preclude an applicant from serving minors.

The St. Marys Methodist Church recommends the utilization of *MinistrySafe*'s consultative service to identify the appropriate background check necessary for each context. The GMC has negotiated discounted rates with *MinistrySafe* for a number of check levels that may be appropriate for any entity adopting this policy.

Background checks are to be renewed every 3 years.
Background check prior to volunteering and every 3 years
Sexual awareness video every 3 years (same cycle as background check)
Annual refresher training for all volunteers

DOCUMENTATION
The St. Marys Methodist Church should maintain sufficient documentation of training, policy signature sheets, and background checks utilizing the *MinistrySafe* tools provided. Volunteers will complete a competency check following volunteer training with a score of 100%.

Child & Youth Safety Policy

ABUSE TOLERANCE

The St. Marys Methodist Church supports and maintains a **zero-tolerance** policy concerning child abuse and neglect. It is a violation of Georgia law for any staff member or volunteer to physically, sexually, or emotionally abuse or neglect any child or youth participating in ministry programs. It is the responsibility of every staff member and volunteer to act in the best interest of all children and youth in every program.

In the event staff members or volunteers observe any inappropriate behaviors (i.e., policy violations, neglectful supervision, poor role-modeling, etc.) or suspected abuse (physical, emotional, or sexual), it is their responsibility and **Georgia law** to **immediately** report their observations to the ministry leader (i.e. Senior Pastor, Children or Youth Director, or member of the Covenant of Care Committee.)

Reporting Abuse or Suspicions of Abuse

REPORTING SUSPICIOUS OR INAPPROPRIATE BEHAVIORS

The St. Marys Methodist Church is committed to providing a safe, secure environment for children, youth, vulnerable adults, and their families. To this end, any report of inappropriate behaviors or **suspicions of abuse** will be taken seriously and will be reported, in accordance with this policy and state law, to local law enforcement (or Child Protective Services) and the local organizational Security Team if applicable.

Recognizing When a Child Discloses Suspicion of Neglect or Abuse
Types of Child Disclosures
Children may not always make a direct statement about what happened.

Indirect disclosure
The child talks about something concerning without directly identifying abuse.
Example:

“The babysitter keeps bothering me.”

Disguised disclosure
The child describes the situation as though it happened to someone else.
Example:
“I know someone who is being touched in a bad way.”

Disclosure with strings attached
The child reveals something but asks the adult to promise secrecy.
Example:
“I have a problem, but if I tell you about it, you have to promise not to tell.”

What to Do When a Child Discloses
Do:
- Find a private place to talk with the child.
- Reassure the child.
- Communicate that you believe them and are glad they told you.
- Listen openly and calmly.
- Keep your emotional reactions and nonverbal responses as neutral as possible.
- Write down the information **as close to the child's own words as possible**.
- Report the concern appropriately.

Don't:
- Ask leading questions.
- Ask blaming questions.
- Try to conduct your own investigation.
- Make promises to the child.
- Promise absolute confidentiality.

Examples of questions to avoid include questions that imply blame or introduce information the child has not provided.

An element of the safe environment referenced above includes the fostering of a culture of reporting relevant information to a supervisor or a member of the Covenant of Care Committee. Because sexual abusers ‘groom’ children for abuse, it is possible a staff member or volunteer may witness behavior intended to ‘groom’ a child or youth for sexual abuse. Staff members and volunteers are asked to report grooming behavior, any policy violations, or any suspicious behaviors to a ministry leader (i.e. Senior Pastor, Children or Youth Director, or member of the Covenant of Care Committee.)

REPORTING VIOLATION OF POLICY
In order to maintain a safe environment for our children and youth, staff members and volunteers must be aware of their individual responsibility to report any questionable circumstance, observation, act, omission, or situation that is a violation of these policies.

All questions or concerns related to inappropriate, suspicious, or suspected grooming behavior should be directed to a ministry leader (i.e. Senior Pastor, Children or Youth Director, or member of the Covenant of Care Committee.)

CONSEQUENCES OF VIOLATION

Any person accused of committing a prohibited act or any act considered by the conference to be harmful to a child or youth will be immediately suspended from participation in conference ministries. This suspension will continue during any investigation by law enforcement, Child Protective agencies, or the organization.

Any person found to have committed a prohibited act should be precluded from future participation as a staff member or volunteer in all activities and programming directed to serve children, youth, or vulnerable populations. Rare exceptions may be made by the senior leadership to allow a person to serve if the senior leadership firmly determines it is appropriate.

Failure to report a prohibited act to the designated person is a violation of this policy and grounds for termination (employee) or removal (volunteer). Volunteers who fail to report a prohibited act may be restricted from participation in any activities involving children, youth, or vulnerable populations.

REPORTING ALLEGATIONS OR SUSPICIONS OF ABUSE

We report all suspected or alleged abuse or neglect of children or youth to local law enforcement or the Department of Family and Child Services (DFCS):

1-855-422-4453

Because many adults are unfamiliar with Georgia reporting requirements and may be fearful of the process, St. Marys Methodist Church utilizes a ‘tandem or dual report’ model, where permitted. A ‘dual report’ occurs when a conference staff person reports the suspicion or allegation *together* with the individual who saw, heard, or received information causing him or her to suspect abuse or neglect.

THIS PRACTICE IS NOT REQUIRED OR INTENDED TO INHIBIT ANY STAFF MEMBER OR VOLUNTEER FROM REPORTING TO LAW ENFORCEMENT OR DFCS. Instead, it is meant to facilitate reporting, protect children and youth, and support individuals who may not feel able or willing to report alone.

NO PERMISSION IS NEEDED before reporting to law enforcement personnel or the Child Abuse Hotline. In addition, a report may be made without involving or informing conference personnel.

While not required by state law, please report all suspicions of child abuse or neglect (or any inappropriate or 'grooming' behaviors of a colleague or coworker) to a to a ministry leader (i.e. Senior Pastor, Children or Youth Director, or member of the Covenant of Care Committee.)

Covenant of Care Committee

COVENANT OF CARE COMMITTEE

Recognizing the importance of providing and maintaining a safe environment for children and youth, St. Marys Methodist Church will appoint and maintain a *Covenant of Care* Committee, which will meet once each quarter.

The purpose of the *Covenant of Care* Committee is to enable children, youth, and vulnerable adult ministries to carry out appropriate ministry activities while safeguarding program participants against emotional, physical, or sexual abuse.

COMPOSITION

The Covenant of Care Committee will be nominated by the Nominations Committee and elected by the Charge Conference annually.

The *Covenant of Care* Committee will include the senior pastor, children and youth program staff, youth and children's choir staff, children and youth committee chairs and the pre-school director.

RESPONSIBILITIES

The *Covenant of Care* Committee will be charged with the following duties:

1. Applying the St. Marys Methodist Church *Covenant of Care* Policy and any local Policies and Procedures related to children and youth safety and risk management issues.
2. Monitoring all Children, Youth, and Vulnerable Adult Ministries programs for ongoing compliance with safety policies.

3. Making recommendations to the ministry leadership or its designate regarding safety issues.

Children and Youth Ministries Staff Monitoring Plan

BUILDING SAFETY

Every ministry director is responsible for ensuring that the ministry program area is monitored during programming serving children and youth. No child or youth will *ever* be left unattended in a ministry area or on a playground during regular programming, classes or activities. All rooms utilized by ministry programs must have unblocked windows allowing observance of the activities of the room from outside. Exterior doors for buildings actively used for nursery and children's programs must remain closed and locked during Sunday children's church ministry hours. We will have a uniformed police officer patrolling the grounds from 9:45am – 11:45am.

SUPERVISION

Only parents (dropping off children), screened ministry volunteers, staff members, and children and youth are allowed in areas where ministry to children and youth is occurring. All other adults should be asked for identification and immediately escorted out of the area. If questions or concerns arise related to any person in the area, a ministry director or security team member should be notified immediately.

Two trained, screened adults should supervise children at all times.
St. Marys Methodist Church practices the ***Two Adult Rule****,* which requires a reasonable number of adult leaders (with a minimum of two) to be maintained when supervising children and youth. A married couple or two family members comprise *one adult* for purposes of compliance with the *Two Adult Rule.* A trained, screened *minor* may be considered to fulfill the *Two Adult Rule* if paired with another trained, screened *adult* and approved by the person responsible for the area of ministry.

If two individuals serving in a room are related, a third unrelated volunteer or staff member must also be present.

Volunteers, if possible, should follow the 5-year rule, which states that all volunteers may only supervise children or youth that are 5 years or younger than themselves.

Avoid being alone with an individual child or youth in any room or during any ministry program. If one supervising adult must leave a group of children or youth, another staff member or volunteer must be notified so that the *Two Adult Rule* can be followed.

If an unusual circumstance occurs and you find yourself alone with a single child or youth, take the child to a room or building occupied by others, or to a location easily observed by others. (Example: if a child is the last in a class to be picked up by a parent, move to an adjoining room where other staff members or volunteers are present.)

If you need to talk with a child alone, do it in the hallway or a highly visible area, or have another leader with you.

Avoid distractions that would impact your ability to effectively supervise children or youth and maintain situational awareness (i.e., use of cell phones, wearing headphones, etc).

After every ministry event, ensure that every room, area, and restroom is checked prior to leaving.

PLAYGROUNDS & OTHER OUTDOOR AREAS

On playgrounds or other outdoor areas, remember to circulate, watching children or youth during play periods, giving particular attention to areas not easily seen from all viewpoints. (Example: under slides, in corners, behind structures.)

Any two children or youth together in an unseen or less easily viewed area should be redirected to another (more open) area of the playground.

WORKER-TO-CHILD RATIOS

St. Marys Methodist Church is committed to providing appropriate supervision in all Children's & Youth Ministries programs. Accordingly, the following worker-to-child minimum ratios will be observed:

Program	**Workers**	**Children**
Nursery	2	8
Preschool, 2 & 3 years old	2	12
Preschool, 4 & 5 years old	2	18
Elementary	2	20

VBS	2	20
Youth	2	1-20
Youth	3	30+

If a program is *out of ratio,* it is the worker's responsibility to immediately notify the appropriate ministry supervisor. Supervisors will make diligent efforts to find substitute workers to immediately bring worker-to-children ratios into compliance with the St. Marys Methodist Church policy.

HAPPY APPLE PRESCHOOL

St Marys weekday Happy Apple preschool meets and exceeds GA Department of Early Leaning requirements for teacher to student ratios for licensed childcare centers.

Happy Apple employs highly-qualified classroom teachers who maintain training, abuse awareness, and background check requirements. The half-day preschool follows safety, supervision, screening and reporting provisions of this policy. Happy Apple meets the 2-adult requirement by maintaining open classroom doors and floaters in the hallway available to classrooms at all times.

Exterior doors to Happy Apple remain locked during preschool hours with protocol in place for visitors to the school.

CHECK-IN (CHILDREN ONLY)

Upon check-in, each child will receive a name tag, and their parent or guardian will be given a claim tag. Volunteers must check each claim tag before releasing a child at pick-up.

If a claim tag is lost, send the parent or guardian to the ministry area supervisor, where proper identification must be shown to a staff member before the child is released. (Have the child stay in the classroom; the parent may pick up the child once cleared.)

RELEASE OF CHILDREN

Staff members and volunteers must act to ensure the appropriate supervision and safety of children in their charge.

Children's Ministries staff members or volunteers are responsible for releasing children in their care only to parents. If parents wish to delegate pickup, the assigned person

must be an adult and have possession of the claim tag at the close of services or activities.

It is presumed a person who drops off a child has authority to pick up the child.

In the event staff members or volunteers are uncertain of the propriety of releasing a child, they should immediately locate or contact the ministry supervisor *before* releasing the child.

Parents who leave a child in the care of staff members and volunteers during ministry activities will be contacted if their child becomes ill, injured, or has a severe disciplinary problem while participating in ministry programs.

Disciplinary Policies

DISCIPLINE

It is the St. Marys Methodist Church policy that staff members and volunteers are prohibited from using physical discipline in any manner for behavioral management of children and youth. **No form of physical discipline is acceptable.** This prohibition includes but is not limited to spanking, slapping, pinching, hitting, or any other physical force as retaliation or correction for inappropriate behaviors by children and youth. When a child or youth is misbehaving, follow these steps:

1. Give a warning and remind the child of class expectations and redirect to a positive behavior. Do this individually, when possible, try not to single out a specific child in a large group setting.
   **When working with younger children, some physical redirection may be necessary: for example, removing a toy from the hands of a child who is hitting another, or gently grabbing a hand or arm for relocation from an environment.*
2. If the child or youth repeats the action, guide him or her to a quiet place – separate from the other children or youth – for a short but designated period of time. Stay within sight of others and avoid being alone (or unseen) with the child.
3. Provide the child or youth with a simple, understandable reason for the separation, and a clear explanation of your expectations. (“Georgia, you didn’t stop hitting Cole when I asked you to, so it was necessary for me to separate you from the group.”)

4. After a third time, refer to a ministry director. A ministry director may inform a parent or guardian, who may be asked to become involved in redirecting misbehavior.

Uncontrollable or unusual behavior should be reported to the ministry supervisor.

NEVER…

- Yell at a child or youth.
- Forcefully grab a child or youth.
- Threaten a child or youth.
- Hit a child or youth.
- Confront a parent in front of others.
- Openly humiliate a child or youth in front of the class.

BULLYING

Verbal, physical, or emotional bullying is not acceptable in ministry programs. At the first sign of bullying in any form, act decisively, and inform your ministry supervisor. There is no *harmless put-down* where bullying is concerned.

1. *First Offense:* Issue a warning to the child or youth and a general reminder to the group that this kind of interaction is wrong. Try not to embarrass or chastise.
2. *Second Offense:* Pull the offending child(ren) or youth from the group (in a seen or supervised location) and discuss the inappropriate interaction or behavior. Set clear parameters and behavioral goals. Let the child or youth know that the next step is communication with a pastor and the child or youth's parents. Notify an immediate supervisor of ANY signs of bullying or verbal abuse.
    a. Privately, but with another adult present, confirm that the child or youth who was the target of the bullying behaviors is not in danger of continued harassment and is physically and emotionally stable. DO NOT SINGLE A CHILD OUT IN FRONT OF THE GROUP... be discreet.
3. *Third Offense:* Send the child to a pastor or ministry supervisor for a phone call (or communication onsite) with his or her parent(s) and possible removal from the activity or event.

Restroom Policies

In single stall restrooms, do not use or occupy a restroom in use by children or youth. In multi-stall restrooms, all attempts should made to not use or occupy a restroom in use by children or youth. No volunteer should enter or occupy a single stall restroom while children or youth are using it. Only adult females may change diapers and must do so on diaper changer stations within plain view of other volunteers.

NURSERY CHILDREN

Because nursery children may require assistance with their restroom activities, all staff members and volunteers will observe the following policies:

Diapering

- Only female nursery workers or the child's parent or legal guardian will undertake the diapering of children of either sex.
- Changing of diapers should be done in plain sight of other nursery workers.
- Children will never be left unattended on changing tables.
- Any special instructions given by parents leaving children in nursery will be recorded on the registration cards ("Seth Adams has a medicine in the bag for rash.")
- Children should be re-diapered and re-clothed immediately upon the completion of changing their soiled diaper.
- **Children should be changed on changing stations only.**

Toilet Training

- No child will be forced to toilet train.
- Only female nursery workers or the child's parent or legal guardian will participate in toilet training efforts with children of either sex.
- When children are taken into restrooms, the door will be left partially open.
- Staff members or volunteers should communicate with parents about each child's progress in the toilet training process.
- Children should be assisted in straightening their clothing before returning to the room with other children.
- 'Accidents' should be handled by reassuring the child and completing the changing of diapers or underwear and clothing. Extra clothing and diapers should be available from the local church in the children's area if the parent has not furnished a clothing change.

GRADES K-5

If you must go into the restroom to check on an individual child, seek out another worker to accompany you. If another worker is not available, go to the exterior restroom door, knock, and ask if the child needs assistance. Do not enter the restroom.
If a child requires immediate assistance, leave the exterior restroom door open when entering the restroom area and try to verbally assist the child in completing his or her toileting activities, while the child remains behind the door of the restroom stall. Any assistance with the straightening or fastening of garments should be done in the presence of another staff member or volunteer.

If restroom use is required:

- Only *adult* female workers will assist children in the restroom, unless a parent is assisting their own child.
- Only one child in the restroom at a time in a single toilet facility.
- When a worker is assisting a child, the door must not be locked and must remain ajar. In general, children should receive the minimum amount of assistance needed based upon their individual capabilities. Encourage children to do all they can for themselves.
- All children in grades 1-3 must be accompanied to the restroom by a female leader. 4th through 5th grade children may go to restrooms alone. In areas of the campus that are more “open” such as the breezeway and upstairs hallway, ministry volunteers will maintain a line of sight to the restroom doors while they are in use by children.
- Be aware if a child repeatedly asks to use the restroom and stays there for unusual periods of time. Report this behavior to a supervisor if it occurs.

DISABILITIES

Parents will offer instruction to staff members or volunteers to change the diapers of individuals with disabilities. After the age of 4, parents or legal guardians will change the diapers of all individuals with disabilities. If individuals with disabilities require assistance using the restroom, a designated and trained individual may assist them in the restroom.

Verbal Interactions with Children & Youth

Verbal interactions between staff members or volunteers and children or youth should be positive and uplifting. Staff members and volunteers should strive to keep verbal interactions encouraging, constructive, and mindful of their mission to aid parents in the spiritual growth and development of children and youth.

To this end, staff members and volunteers should not talk to children or youth in a way that is or could be construed by any reasonable observer as harsh, threatening, intimidating, shaming, derogatory, demeaning, or humiliating. In addition, staff members and volunteers are expected to refrain from swearing in the presence of children or youth.

One-to-One Interactions with Children

Staff members and volunteers should never conduct one-to-one, unobserved meetings or interaction with children while participating in children's ministries programs. Another adult who has completed the application and screening process should always be present.

One-to-One Interactions with Youth

Meeting the emotional or spiritual needs of youth may occasionally involve interaction on an individual basis. Please observe the following guidelines when interacting with minors:

The Two Adult Rule should be diligently followed during ministry programs. Do not interact *alone* with an individual youth in any room or building. In the event you find yourself alone with a single youth, move to a room or area occupied by others, or to a location easily observed by others.

One-to-one meetings with an individual youth must occur at a time when others are present and where interactions can be easily observed. *Example:* If a youth desires additional conversation after regular programming has concluded, move to an adjoining room where other staff members or volunteers are present, or into a public space.

Never hold a one-to-one meeting with a youth who is the opposite gender.

If a closed-door meeting must occur, it should occur on church property, with a second adult present. The door must remain unlocked, and any window treatments *open.*

Any ongoing meetings with youth (such as counseling, one-to-one discipleship, etc.) should be discussed with a Youth Ministry staff member and should comply with the Two Adult Rule OR occur in a public, easily observed location.

Staff members and adult volunteers may not date (or have *any* sort of romantic interaction with) youth in the Youth Ministry.

Sexually Oriented Conversations

Staff members and volunteers are prohibited from engaging in any sexually oriented conversations with children or youth and are not permitted to discuss any inappropriate or explicit information about their own personal relationships, dating or sexual activities with any child in the program, excepting pastoral or counseling sessions approved by the parents or legal guardian.

However, it is expected that older children and youth ministry discussions and lessons may occasionally address issues related to purity, dating, sex and human sexuality. These lessons will convey the church's views on these topics to the child or youth.

Youth who desire to discuss specific issues or concerns of a sexually oriented nature should be directed to the Youth Director, Pastoral Staff, church counselor, or other appropriate supervisor.

Sexually Oriented Material

Staff members and volunteers in children & youth ministries are prohibited from possessing any sexually oriented materials (magazines, cards, images, videos, etc.) on church property or in the presence of children or youth.

Physical Contact

St. Marys Methodist Church is committed to protecting children and youth in its care. To this end, St. Marys Methodist Church has implemented a 'physical contact policy' which promotes a positive, nurturing environment for our youth & children's ministries while protecting children and youth. Appropriate touch is needed and encouraged, but it is vital that staff members and volunteers do not blur or cross the lines. In light of this, the following guidelines should be observed:

- Physical contact in any form should be above reproach, for the benefit of the child or youth, and never based upon the emotional needs of a staff member or volunteer.
- Physical contact in any form should not give even the appearance of wrongdoing. The personal behavior of staff members or volunteers in children and youth ministries must foster trust at all times.
- Appropriate physical affection between staff members or volunteers and children or youth is important for children's development and is generally suitable in the church setting.
    - Pat a hand, shoulder, or back in an encouraging manner.
    - Side hugs: in public view and kept brief. When hugging someone, hugs should be limited to side hugs.
    - Look for opportunities to give plenty of "high fives" and "fist bumps", unless this makes a child or youth feel uncomfortable.
    - Shake hands or briefly put an arm around the child or youth's shoulder.

AVOID the following interactions:

- A sexual relationship with a youth is never acceptable.
- Never touch a child in sensitive areas (breasts, buttocks, genitals) even if a child has been injured in one of these areas. Never allow casual contact in these areas, under or over clothing.
- If a hug is initiated by the child, avoid a two-arm / full-frontal hug, a side hug is more appropriate.
- No sitting on laps with older children and youth.

- No hand-holding, unless part of a worship/prayer service, group game, or transitions from one area to another.
- Never touch in anger or disgust.
- Never touch in a manner that may be construed as sexually suggestive.
- Avoid touching a child between the navel and the knees.
- Never carry a child piggy-back, or on your shoulders.
- Never place hands beneath a child's clothing to play, rub, or comfort.
- Never kiss a child or youth, or give (or receive) a massage.
- Never tickle, participate in 'horse-play', or wrestle with a child.

Do not force physical contact, touch, or affection on a reluctant child. A child's preference not to be touched must be respected. An exception may be made to remove a child from an environment or to protect the child or others.

Physical affection should occur only in observable locations or when in the presence of other staff members and volunteers. It is much less likely that touch will be inappropriate or misinterpreted when physical contact is open to observation. All spaces utilized by children and youth must be observable at all times — including the use of glass in doors.

Staff members and volunteers are responsible for protecting children and youth under their supervision from inappropriate or unwanted touch by others, including other children or youth.

Inappropriate touch and inappropriate displays of affection are forbidden. Any inappropriate physical contact, touch, or display of affection should be immediately reported to the ministry area supervisor.

Any inappropriate behavior or suspected abuse by a staff member or volunteer must be reported immediately to the ministry area supervisor.

Electronic Communication

All communication with children must be above reproach and indicative of healthy boundaries. As with any communication, the content of any electronic communication should be readily available to share with ministry leadership or a parent.

TEXTING (and Other Communication Apps)

Texting between staff members or volunteers and children (through 5th grade) is **not permissible**. Texting between staff members or volunteers and youth is permissible, but should always include a second staff, intern, parent, or volunteer on any communication. *No one-to-one texting communication may occur with children or youth.*

Texts should occur in 'group' form. Though youth may reply individually, make every effort to text in group form and encourage replies to the group. When possible, staff members should send and receive texts using a ministry-provided device or account.

Prudent judgment must be used in the timing and content of texts. **Do not text before 7:00 am or after 9:00 pm** unless the texting occurs as part of a programmed ministry activity.

Avoid discussion of ANY sexual topic via texts.

It is not permissible to send or request photos or videos to a child or youth. In exceptional cases, such as requesting or sharing photos of a youth event, this may be permissible if done via a group text.

COMMUNICATION APPLICATIONS

It is permissible for the ministry to use applications that have messaging features – using a Children or Youth Ministry account. At least one other staff member must have credentials to access the application and regularly review the messaging, comments, and postings.

SOCIAL MEDIA & PHOTO POLICY OF CHURCH EVENTS

Personal photos of local church children and youth events should not be published on personal social media accounts and should be directed to an area ministry director to be

submitted to the ministry media team. Staff and volunteers are encouraged to share the media published by St. Marys Methodist Church.

Parents who do not wish to have photos of their children or youth posted on social media may opt-out, and all efforts will be made to not include these children or youth. St. Marys Methodist Church does reserve the right to use general group photos where individuals are not prominently presented as well as any photos from public events without parental consent.

PERSONAL SOCIAL MEDIA

Staff members and volunteers must maintain a high moral standard in social media presence. Inappropriate social media content may be a basis for suspension from participation in children's and youth ministries at conference events. Please be cautious about the content of the posts on your personal social media. Please ensure that photos or videos posted on social media reflect the values of St. Marys Methodist Church.

Tobacco Use

St. Marys Methodist Church requires staff members and volunteers to abstain from the use or possession of tobacco products in church facilities, while in the presence of children, youth or their parents, or during local church activities or programs, whether on campus or away. St. Marys Methodist Church facilities are tobacco-free.

Intoxicants

Staff members and volunteers are prohibited from the use, possession, or being under the influence of alcohol or any illegal drugs while in any St. Marys Methodist Church facility, while traveling with children or youth, or while working with or supervising children or youth during any program or activity.

Nudity

Staff members and volunteers in the children's and youth ministries should never be nude in the presence of children or youth.

Physical Appearance

Staff members and volunteers as well as children and youth at conference events should dress in modest, comfortable attire. First impressions are important; please take this into consideration while serving.

Medication

Do not administer medication of any kind to any child or youth while serving in ministry programs, including over the counter drugs, except when pre-approved by the parents and administered by the area supervisor. For certain trips or activities (i.e., mission trips, camps, etc.), St. Marys Methodist Church will provide a parent-approved designee who will dispense appropriate medications consistent with other policies and signed parent permission forms. Prescribed medications **must** be in the original container and the name matching the intended recipient.

Transportation

Staff and volunteers may, from time to time, be in a position to provide transportation for children or youth. The following guidelines should be strictly observed when workers are involved in the transportation of children or youth during a conference event:

- All drivers must have a DMV background check on file in addition to other required background checks.
- Drivers should maintain the appropriate DMV credentialing for the vehicle utilized (e.g. CDL).
- No drivers under age 25 may drive a church owned or rented vehicle.
- Children or youth should be transported directly to their destination. Unauthorized stops to a non-public place should be avoided.
- Staff members and volunteers should avoid transportation circumstances that leave only one child in transport.
- Staff members and volunteers should avoid physical contact with children or youth while in vehicles.

- Absent an emergency, **cell phones may not be used by drivers** while transporting minors (other than navigation applications for directions). In an emergency, stop the vehicle to use the cell phone, unless a stop cannot safely occur. Texting or other cell phone use is strictly prohibited while driving.
- In transportation, the TWO ADULT RULE (or rule of three for related adults) must be followed. Specific exceptions may be granted by a child or youth guardian (in writing if possible), such as transport of a child before or after the event.
- Transport only the number of children or youth for whom you have seatbelts.
- Seatbelts should be worn at all times while in the vehicle.
- No one should be double-buckled.
- Use extra caution when driving children or youth.

Out-of-Program Contact with Youth

St. Marys Methodist Church Covenant of Care safety standards established to protect youth and ensure healthy relationships should be respected outside ministry programs as well. In addition to ministry safety standards, the following policies should be respected in all interactions with youth occurring outside ministry programs.

- Never be alone with a minor in an unobserved context or location (public and observed meetings are acceptable).
- Limit connections by gender. Do not initiate or maintain contact with youth of the opposite gender.
- Any dating or sexual relationship of any kind with a minor is strictly prohibited.
- Never spend the night at a youth's home or invite a youth to spend the night at your home outside of scheduled, group church events and adhering to the two-adult rule.
- Do not spend the night in an 'away' location with any youth (vacation, etc.) outside of scheduled, group church events and adhering to the two-adult rule. If pre-existing family relationships exist wherein overnights may occur between 'family friends', these events must be approved by the child or youth's guardian. The volunteer or staff must make ministry supervisor aware of the preexisting relationship.

Planning Group Events

When planning a group event outside of regular programming, volunteer leaders should keep parents and staff members informed of details and abide by St. Marys Methodist Church *Covenant of Care* policies. Some events may require a release form.

OVERNIGHT EVENTS

Some children and youth ministry activities/events require overnight sleeping arrangements for children, youth, staff members, and volunteers (i.e., camp, mission trips, etc.). All programmed overnights must be approved by a ministry supervisor and receive permission from parents. No overnights are allowed on church property unless part of a ministry-sponsored event.

Any scheduled Children or Youth overnight event must maintain 1 adult per 6 children or youth of the same gender ratio.

Overnight Specific Practices:

- *At no point will adults be present in private bathroom areas or present when children/youth are changing clothes in single stall restrooms/sleeping quarters.*
- *At no point will an adult share a bed with a child/youth (even of the same family).*
- *Siblings of the same gender may share queen size beds and larger.*
- *At no point will males be in female sleeping quarters/bathrooms.*
- *At no point will females be in male sleeping quarters/bathrooms.*
- *At no point will two same gender children/youth in a romantic relationship share sleeping quarters/bathrooms.*
- *When possible, make arrangements for a leaders bunk/room and student/children rooms for overnight trips.*

GLOBAL METHODIST CHURCH
SOUTH GEORGIA

Volunteer/Staff Statement of Acknowledgement and Agreement

I have received and read a copy of St. Marys Methodist Church *Covenant of Care* Policies and Procedures and understand the importance of the material in the manual. I agree to abide by these guidelines while serving or working at St. Marys Methodist Church.

I understand the manual may be modified, and that any guideline may be amended, revised, or eliminated by St. Marys Methodist Church.

I have reviewed the duties listed in my ministry position description, and I agree to fulfill these duties. I understand I may choose to end my employment or voluntary service at St. Marys Methodist Church at any time (if possible, I will provide two weeks' notice to my supervisor).

I acknowledge and understand that the materials and guidelines contained in this manual in no way express or imply a contractual employment relationship between St. Marys Methodist Church and me. If applying as a volunteer, I acknowledge and agree that I will receive no monetary compensation for hours worked.

I understand it is my responsibility to review new guidelines which may be created and distributed.

I acknowledge receipt of St. Marys Methodist Church *Covenant of Care* policies and procedures.

_____
Staff member or volunteer name (please print)

_____
Staff member or volunteer signature

_____
Date

This page is to be signed, detached, and delivered to the Ministry Supervisor.