



Safe Sanctuary

Policy for Safe Ministry with
Children/Youth and Vulnerable Adults

Our calling and our mandate is to ensure safe sanctuary for God's people.



The Safe Sanctuary Policies and procedures will be reviewed annually to assure that they conform to current legal, health and safety standards.

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Purpose and Scope

Our congregation's purpose for establishing this policy is to demonstrate our unwavering commitment to create within our ministries a "safe sanctuary" that will foster healthy growth and development for all children/youth and vulnerable adults. We pledge to conduct the ministry of the gospel in ways that assure the safety and spiritual growth of all our children/youth and vulnerable adults as well as all those who work with them. We commit ourselves as a community of faith to this policy of safety for children, youth and vulnerable adults.

As Christians, we are called to create a safe sanctuary in our churches. They must be holy, safe, and protective communities for all of God's children, regardless of age or ability. The purpose of this policy is to address the safety of our children and youth church sponsored events. St. Matthew's United Methodist Church recognizes the need to have a formal, written policy with procedures in place (1) to help prevent the opportunity for the occurrence and/or the appearance of abuse of children and youth and (2) to help protect workers from false accusations and/or suspicions.

The following policy and procedures are not based on a lack of trust in workers, but are intended to protect our preschoolers, children, youth, workers, employees, volunteers and the entire church body. Careful and confidential documentation is essential to show compliance with policies, to verify information as needed, and to have an accurate record in the case of an incident.

This policy and its provisions shall apply to all persons including all paid and unpaid leaders, whether lay or clergy who have any direct or indirect contact with children and youth who participate in any activities or events sponsored by St. Matthew's UMC.

**Each United Methodist Church is required to adopt a Safe Sanctuary policy for their church by December 31, 2005 and submit the policy to the district and conference. This Safe Sanctuary policy shall be available on the church's web site, the Church office and in the Narthex.

Overview

It is our policy to:

- A. follow reasonable safety measures in the election and recruitment of workers; have in place basic procedures for recruitment, screening and selection of volunteer leaders for children/youth and vulnerable adult ministries;
- B. Establish the minimum standards of care for nursery and child care providers and during worship
- C. implement prudent procedures in all programs and events; including adequate supervision and support for workers as they are in ministry on our behalf;
- D. articulate appropriate disciplinary procedures for maladaptive behaviors;
- E. outline requirements for the transportation of any child or youth.
- F. conform church facilities to meet reasonable safety standards to reduce risk of harm or injury;
- G. provide for volunteers adequate training regarding the implementation of our policies, procedures, and preferred methodologies;
- H. educate parents and others in our congregation as to our policies and procedures;
- I. annually review our policies and procedures to assure that they conform to current legal, health, and safety standards.
- J. clearly define the procedures for responding to and reporting instances of injury, harm or abuse that conforms to requirements of state law;

Application

This Policy applies to all volunteers and staff interacting with children, youth or vulnerable adults at St. Matthews and/or St. Matthew's sponsored events, both onsite and off.

A separate written policy applies to all children's weekday ministry/preschool personnel. That policy can be found and reviewed in the Church office or School office.

It is a privilege to work with youth. Great responsibility is required. Those who violate this policy shall immediately be removed from contact with children and youth and appropriate authorities shall be notified immediately.

Definitions

1. The Term "**Adult**" shall mean any individual at least eighteen (18) years of age, except as noted below regarding Youth.
2. The term "**Child**" shall mean any individual less than twelve (12) years of age.
3. The term "**Youth**" shall mean any individual at least twelve (12) years of age (6th grade or equivalent) and less than eighteen (18) years of age. NOTE: Individuals, who turn 18 during their senior year in high school, or homeschool equivalent, will be considered a Youth as defined herein.
4. The term "**Vulnerable Adult**" shall mean any adult aged 18 or over who, due to disability, mental function, age, or illness or traumatic circumstances, may not be able to take care or protect themselves.
5. The term "**Church Staff**" shall mean any individual who receives monetary compensation from St. Matthew's except School Personnel.
6. The term "**School Personnel**" shall mean any individual employed by St. Matthew's to work for Children's Weekday Ministries.
7. The term "**Trained Adult Volunteer**" shall mean those who have successfully:
 - Completed an application form;
 - Provided three (3) non-family references as to their character and relational skills; and
 - Undergone a criminal background check.
 - Completed a St. Matthews' approved safe sanctuary training.
8. The term "**Offsite**" shall mean anywhere else other than the campus of St. Matthew's.
9. The term "**Onsite**" shall mean the physical campus of St. Matthew's located at 4300 North Shepherd, Houston, Texas 77018.
10. The term "**Abuse**" shall include Verbal abuse, physical abuse and sexual abuse as defined below:
 - Verbal Abuse– Any verbal act that humiliates, degrades or threatens any child or youth.

- Physical Abuse– Any act of omission or an act that endangers a person's physical or mental health. In the case of child or youth physical abuse, this definition includes any intentional physical injury caused by the individual's caretaker. Physical abuse may result from punishment that is overly punitive or inappropriate to the individual's age or condition. In addition, physical abuse may result from purposeful acts that pose serious danger to physical health of a child or youth. According to the Texas State of Physical Abuse is physical injury that results in substantial harm to the child, or the genuine threat of substantial harm from physical injury to the child. The physical injury (ranging from minor bruises to severe fractures or death) can result from punching, beating, shaking, kicking, biting, throwing, stabbing, hitting, burning, choking, or otherwise harming a child. Such injury is considered abuse regardless of whether the caretaker intended to hurt the child.
- Sexual Abuse– Child or youth sexual abuse is the sexual exploitation or use of same for satisfaction of sexual drives. This includes, but is not limited to: 1) incest, 2) rape, 3) prostitution, 4) romantic involvement with any participant, 5) any sexual intercourse, or sexual conduct with, or fondling of an individual enrolled as a child or youth in Conference or District sponsored activities, 6) sexualized behavior that communicates sexual interest and/or content. Examples are not limited to: displaying sexually suggestive visual materials, making sexual comments or innuendo about one's own or another person's body, touching another person's body, hair or clothing, touching or rubbing oneself in the presence of another person, kissing, and sexual intercourse. (#6 taken from Resolution #30 Book of Resolutions 2000).

***Further Explanations of the policy on the following pages.

A. Follow reasonable safety measures in the selection and recruitment of Adult Volunteers:

- All Trained Adult Volunteers who work with children/youth shall have been an attendee of St. Matthew's with their peers in the life of the congregation for at least six (6) months and meet with the pastor of the church. The six (6) month requirement may be reduced or eliminated if the prospective volunteer provides a letter of recommendation from their previous pastor or if the member has evidence of having taken Safe Sanctuary Training in the past 2 years.
- Prior to volunteering with children, youth or vulnerable adults, every Adult Volunteer shall complete a criminal background check before assuming an assignment in children/youth or vulnerable adults functions. This information will be reviewed and updated every year.
- Adult volunteers will be required to complete Safe Sanctuary training, including a review of the policy, annually.
- A list of trained Adult Volunteers shall be maintained in the church office and revised annually as needed.
- A criminal background check must be performed on all persons prior to them working with children/youth or vulnerable adults in any capacity and updated annually. ** If the Pastor is aware of a prior child abuse conviction or other at-risk behaviors, he/she/they should prohibit the participation of that individual in children/youth or vulnerable adult related activities with no explanation required to the group recruiting that person. This will protect the confidentiality of the Pastor/parishioner relationship as well as protecting the safety of the children/youth and vulnerable adults.
- The Pastor, church administrative staff, staff-parish chairperson and/or a member of the staff-parish committee shall hold all information obtained from the criminal background check in strict confidence. The records shall be kept in a locked file in the church office.
- Persons having a criminal history of any of the following types of offenses shall not be allowed to serve in any ministry with children and youth:
 - Child abuse, whether physical, emotional, sexual, or neglectful
 - Violent offenses, including murder, rape, assault, domestic violence, etc.
 - Persons having a Criminal History of DUI or DWI conviction within the five (5) years immediately prior to application shall not be allowed to act as a driver.

- Persons having a Criminal History of a drug related conviction within the five (5) years immediately prior to application shall not be allowed to participate in the event.

B. Establish the minimum standards of care for nursery and child care providers and during worship.

- Trained Adult Volunteers and Staff shall follow proper sanitary procedures as posted when changing diapers and caring for toilet needs of children, youth and disabled adults.
- Children with a fever, nausea, or a combinations of symptoms shall be safely removed from nurseries and classes to avoid exposure of others and immediately returned to the care of the parents or guardians.
- Only parents of children in the nursery and trained designated Trained Adult Volunteers, Staff and School Personnel shall be in the nursery while children are in care.
- Church Staff/CWM Staff who work with infants, children/youth or vulnerable adults shall provide documentation of current certification in First Aid and Basic Cardiopulmonary Life Support for Infants, Children, and Adults.
- All CWM Staff and trained adult volunteers who work with infants under 24 months will provide documentation of current certification in Shaken Infant Death Syndrome, Shaken Baby Syndrome and Infant Brain Development.

C. Implement prudent operational procedures in all programs and events:

The following procedures are to be followed to aid in protecting our children/youth and vulnerable adults and volunteers in our ministry.

- At no time shall only one child/youth or vulnerable adult be alone with only one trained adult volunteer.
- When possible, two trained adult volunteers shall be present at all times during any church sponsored program, event, or ministry involving children. These two adults shall not be from the same household. If two trained adults are not available, the activities in the room must be clearly visible through an unobscured window or an open door.
- For youth or vulnerable adults, only one trained adult volunteer need be present as long as there are two or more youth or vulnerable adults present.

- The trained adult volunteer who will be present and assume primary responsibility for a church sponsored program involving children/youth or vulnerable adults shall be at least 18 years of age.
- For church sponsored programs involving teenagers, the trained adult volunteer who will be present and assume primary responsibility shall be at least 5 years older than the oldest teen participant in the program.
- Parent/guardians must sign a general permission form for planned off-site activities that are part of regular programs.
- Children under the age of 12 must be checked in and out when dropped off at church sponsored events. Youth ages 12-18 are not required to be signed in and out.
- Trained Adult volunteers in church-sponsored programs for children/youth and vulnerable adults shall participate in an annual training regarding St. Matthew's UMC Safe Sanctuary policy. This training will include a review of the policies and procedures and a written covenant signed by all trained adult volunteers to uphold these policies and procedures.
- Approved Annual Safe Sanctuary Training classes (in person and/or online) will be scheduled and the dates, time and place posted and the congregation notified on the Church website, e-newsletter and Church bulletin by the Church Pastor or their designee.
- Trained Adult volunteers responsible for overnight trips with youth shall provide documentation of current certification in First Aid and Basic Cardiopulmonary Life Support for Children and Adults.
- At events that require overnight accommodations, at least two Trained Adult Volunteers, of the same sex, shall be in the sleeping room.
- The parent/guardian of children/youth or vulnerable adults participating in church-sponsored programs will be given reasonable advance notice of all expected activities for those programs. Parents/guardians shall be provided with advance notice of variations in usual schedules and activities.

D. Articulate appropriate disciplinary procedures for maladaptive behaviors;

- Children and youth should be made aware that appropriate behavior is expected at all church events. Gentle reminders are always necessary when dealing with

children and youth. When these reminders don't work, then discipline needs to move to the next step.

- A reasonable response might include a period of "time out" for the child or youth. This should be done with necessary supervision keeping safe sanctuary guidelines in mind. In no case is physical discipline an appropriate measure to deal with problems.
- Parents need to be kept up to date on their child's behavior. For serious offenses, the appropriate response will be to make proper arrangements for the child or youth to be picked up by a parent or guardian immediately or safely sent home if not on site.
- No trained adult volunteer or youth volunteer ever shall inflict physical punishment or otherwise abusive action (including but not limited to pops, hand slaps, use of belts or rulers to inflict pain or verbal abuse) as a form of disciplinary action upon a child in their care at or on behalf of St. Matthew's or offsite for ministry events. Use of corporal punishment or abusive action, including verbal abuse is grounds for immediate dismissal of the adult volunteer or staff
- Under NO CIRCUMSTANCES will any physical discipline be used. Spanking, squeezing, pinching, hitting, and shaking are strictly prohibited. If a child is exhibiting extreme behavior, the coordinator, if applicable, will be notified to oversee any consequences or removal from the group.
- Under NO CIRCUMSTANCES will rude or abusive language be used. This includes calling a child a name even in jest, saying "shut-up," making fun of a child or teasing. Humiliation or shaming of a child in any form is never allowed. No vulgar language is allowed while on church property.

E. Outline requirements for the transportation of any child or youth.

- Individuals providing transportation for programs, activities, or events for children, youth or vulnerable adults shall:
 - hold a valid driver's license with proof of insurance and limits of insurance required by Texas State law;
 - use a vehicle in good mechanical condition;
 - carry no more passengers than can be secured in seat belts or appropriate restraints;

- be at least 21 years of age;
- At least one Trained Adult Volunteer must be in any vehicle transporting children, youth or vulnerable adults to or from Church sponsored events if child, youth or vulnerable persons are not accompanied by a parent or guardian. At no time should there be only one child, youth or vulnerable adult in a vehicle with only one adult volunteer, which is not the parent/guardian.
- Transportation to and from church events of children/youth and vulnerable adults shall be the ultimate responsibility of the parents/guardians.

F. Conform church facilities to reduce risk of harm or injury:

- Every classroom and office door in which children, youth and vulnerable adults may be present shall have a window or the door must be kept open providing a view of the interior as indicated herein.
- Trustees shall ensure that the facilities are inspected regularly for safety hazards. Toxic materials, including cleaning and other supplies, shall be stored in locked facilities well out of the reach of children/youth and vulnerable adults.
- Electrical outlets in children's classrooms and the Fellowship Hall shall be covered when not in use.
- Playground areas shall be checked regularly for dangers.
- Emergency exit plans shall be posted in each area of the building and shall be reviewed regularly with parents, trained adult volunteers, youth, teachers, and staff.

G. Provide adequate training regarding the implementation of our policies, procedures, and preferred methodologies for volunteers and staff:

- Adult volunteers and staff will be required to complete Safe Sanctuary training, including annual review of this policy.
- Training shall include but is not limited to appropriate discipline, appropriate physical and emotional boundaries and leader misconduct.
- Training for supervision and care shall be offered based on the context of care (Sunday worship childcare, CWM Childcare Center, youth events on site, youth events off site, Vacation Bible School, etc.)

- Training for childcare in the Children's weekday ministries Child Development Center shall conform to state licensing standards, at minimum.

H. Educate parents and others in our congregation:

- The church shall make available this Safe Sanctuary Policy and procedures to all members and other interested parties.
- Trained Adult Volunteers, Staff, Church Members and interested parties shall be informed of any updates or changes to the policy when those changes are implemented.
- This complete written Safe Sanctuary Policy and procedures with attachments shall be available on the St. Matthew's UMC web site, Church office and in the Narthex.

I. Annually review our policies and procedures to assure that they conform to current legal, health, and safety standards:

- The church shall submit a copy of the current safe sanctuary policy to the District Superintendent with Charge Conference Documents.
- All trained volunteers must submit re-authorization for background check in January of the following year.
- All trained volunteers should take a refresh safe sanctuary training course to be educated on updates or changes to the policy or laws.
- The Pastor should verify reporting procedures to ensure that the policy is consistent with current laws.

J. Clearly defined procedure for responding and reporting instances of alleged injury, harm or abuse:

1. The Trained Adult Volunteer or Staff Member shall take the following steps immediately.

- Insure the privacy and safety of the alleged victim.
- Treat the accused individuals involved with dignity, honor and confidentiality.
- Communicate the nature and details of the incident with the program supervisor or event coordinator

- Immediately remove the accused individual from further involvement with children/youth or vulnerable adults.
- Notify the Pastor(s) (or the chair of the Board of Stewards if the pastor is accused or unavailable) immediately.
- Complete a written report form for each incident, accident or abusive situation. (See page

2. Upon notification, the Pastor(s) or the chair of the Board of Stewards shall take the following steps immediately.

- Notify the parents/guardians of the alleged victim.
- Address any needs the child/youth or vulnerable adult may have, including medical.
- Notify each of the following:
 - the proper law enforcement agency and/or Department of Family and Protective Services (800-252-5400)
 - the District Superintendent
 - St. Matthew's UMC insurance agent
 - St. Matthew's UMC attorney (if there is one on retainer)

3. The Pastors or the chair of the Board of Stewards will:

- Notify the District Superintendent
- Keep a written record of each step taken including times and dates
- Prepare a brief, carefully worded statement to the congregation, telling the truth, but withholding the names of the alleged victim and the accused.
- Contact the complainant to advise that the complaint is being taken seriously and what actions are being taken.
- Cooperate fully with the investigation conducted by law enforcement personnel

Contact Information

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***The District Superintendent will represent St. Matthew's UMC in response to the accusation, with respect to the media and law enforcement.

Procedures For Responding and Reporting

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- Treat the accused individuals involved with dignity, honor and confidentiality.
- Communicate the nature and details of the incident with the program supervisor or event coordinator
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- Notify the District Superintendent
- Keep a written record of each step taken including times and dates
- Prepare a brief, carefully worded statement to the congregation, telling the truth, but withholding the names of the alleged victim and the accused.
- Contact the complainant to advise that the complaint is being taken seriously and what actions are being taken.
- Cooperate fully with any investigation conducted by law enforcement personnel



Safe Sanctuary Incident Report Form

Today's Date:	
Name:	
Date of Incident:	
Time of Incident:	
Exact location:	
Person(s) involved/affected:	
Child(ren) affected:	
Name(s) of Staff Present:	
Clear Incident Description:	
Was anyone injured?	
First Aid Required?	
First Aid Provided:	
Action Taken:	
Was the Pastor notified?	
Parent's Notified?	
Follow-Up Required:	
Reported By:	
Date/Time Reported:	

Additional Notes/Comments on following page

Additional Notes/Comments

Reporter		Date	
Witness		Date	
Parent/Guardian		Date	
Pastor/Designee		Date	