



St. Paul's United Methodist Church Safe Sanctuary Policy Houston, Texas

Introduction

OUR CALLING AND OUR MANDATE IS TO ENSURE SAFE SANCTUARY FOR GOD'S PEOPLE.

Throughout the gospels, Jesus provides teachings on providing a peaceable kingdom for all of God's people, including our most precious gifts, our children and youth (Matthew 5:9, Luke 18:15-17). The peaceable kingdom begins with sanctuary.

Scriptures provide examples of how sanctuary is to be a community of protective nurture and harmony (Psalms 20:1-2, 27:4-5). 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 at our church. We recognize 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 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 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.

Scope of Policy

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 sponsored by the Church.

This policy shall be applicable at all Church activities involving children and youth. Examples include, but are not limited to the following: UM ARMY, summer camps, mission trips, Confirmation retreats, youth leadership meetings, choir practices, St. Paul's Boy Scout

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troop, and Sunday School. Students enrolled in college or of college age are not considered “youth” under this policy.

Any outside organization, group(s) or individual(s) who use any of the facilities of the Church (including any such group or individual that might be subject to their own respective organization’s rules and regulations concerning safety of those individuals for whom they are responsible) shall sign an Indemnification and Release form stating that they understand and are in compliance with this policy.

It is the intention of St. Paul’s that every effort shall be made to comply with the provisions of this Policy. However, recognizing the human condition, we acknowledge that substantial compliance with the Policy shall be deemed to be compliance with the Policy.

The church reserves the right to reject any applicant, in its sole discretion.

Definition of Childcare Provider, Assistant Leader, and Leader

- A childcare provider is a person eighteen (18) years of age or older with a high school diploma or equivalent.
- An assistant leader is a person eighteen (18) years of age or older with a high school diploma or equivalent who is supporting a leader.
- A leader is a person who is twenty-one (21) years of age or older.

Supervision

General Guidelines:

- As much as is possible, there should be unobstructed visibility to all activities where children and youth are present. Classroom doors should have windows in them or remain open.
- To achieve compliance with this policy, it may be necessary to combine groups; recruit and train additional volunteers; or cancel an event.
- Recognizing that there is safety in numbers, children and youth will be instructed to use the “buddy system.”
- Activities for children and youth need clear communication with parents prior to the event, with full information about the event, and written parental permission for events specified by the Church (transportation, lock-ins, off site events, overnight trips, etc.)
- It is required that there be present at least one leader who is trained in First Aid and CPR at all Church events for children and youth.

Supervision for nursery/childcare at Church events:

- There shall be a minimum of two (2) childcare providers per room.
- State childcare minimum standards shall be followed, particularly in the number of childcare providers to child ratio.
- Changing a diaper and assisting a young child with the bathroom as needed should take place where the worker and the child are in sight with the child's privacy protected.

Supervision of children and youth at Church events:

- Church events shall observe the “2 Leader Rule” (two leaders per classroom, two leaders within sight when outdoors.)
- The leader may allow one leader and one assistant leader (instead of two leaders) on a case-by-case basis.
- Any one-to-one mentoring or consulting shall be conducted in sight of another leader. If indoors, the door of the room used should remain open for the entire session.
- Understanding that there is safety in numbers, one leader can be in contact with multiple youth (6th-12th grade) if they are in the line of sight of other leaders.

Overnight accommodations:

- At events that require overnight accommodations, leaders shall sleep in a separate room, or if it is necessary to share a room, leaders shall sleep in separate beds.
- Recognizing accommodations may be restrictive in certain cases, one leader may sleep in a separate bed in a room with children and youth, but no leader shall be alone with any child or youth in a hotel/cabin room under any circumstances.
- Coed overnight activities require male and female leaders without exception.

Definition of Abuse

- Verbal Abuse - Any verbal act that humiliates, degrades or threatens any child or youth.
- Physical Abuse - Any act of omission of 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.
- 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 child or youth, 5) any sexual intercourse, or sexual conduct with, or fondling of a child or youth, 6) sexualized behavior that communicates sexual interest and/or content. Examples include: displaying sexually suggestive visual materials, making sexual comments or innuendos 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.

Screening for Leaders, Assistant Leaders, and Childcare Providers

Careful screening is one way to prevent the abuse of children and youth. Screening calls for a careful gathering and review of information in search of those who can provide safe and caring supervision in a safe environment.

1. Prior to employment or acceptance as a leader, assistant leader or childcare provider (paid or unpaid), the event coordinator or administrator in charge of an event or program shall direct each prospective applicant to complete the application/consent form. By signing the form, the

applicant gives the Church permission to contact references and perform any necessary investigation to complete the review of the application.

2. The Church shall facilitate a screening check with any appropriate agencies.
3. The Church shall request references of lay applicants, or if the applicant is a professional minister, the Church shall request references from the District Superintendent.
4. The Church shall receive the completed forms and reports, and review them. If any of the reports raises questions about fitness of the applicant, the Church will disapprove the application and notify the applicant. The Church reserves the right to turn away any persons for service.
5. If the applicant (paid or unpaid) is found to have been involved in any activity in which the applicant abused or exploited children or youth, the applicant will not be approved. Any conviction of a crime against children or youth shall disqualify any applicant.
6. Results of screens shall be kept confidential. The determination of whether a particular crime is serious enough to result in the Church denying an application shall be made by the Church in its sole discretion. Without in any way limiting those crimes that the Church may determine to be serious as such, the Church offers the following examples as guidelines:
 - 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.

Training

The Church shall provide mandatory training and orientation procedures for all persons in leadership who work with children and youth at Church activities. Training shall include but is not limited to appropriate discipline, appropriate physical and emotional boundaries, leader misconduct, and this policy. No person shall have any direct or indirect contact with children and/or youth until they have completed this training program.

The Church may appoint a committee to oversee such training. This policy and any related procedures create a status of Safe Sanctuary Certification. Applicants thus certified are entrusted with the title "Certified Safe Sanctuary Worker with Children and Youth."

Reporting of Incidents

1. When a leader of a Church-sponsored activity suspects that abuse or any suspected violation of the Texas Penal Code is taking or has taken place, he or she shall call 911 when needed and report the abuse to the appropriate local law enforcement agency and/or the Department of Protective and Regulatory Services (800-252-5400). The leader shall contact the event coordinator and the Senior Pastor immediately (or if the Senior Pastor is suspected to be involved in such abuse, the District Superintendent), and cooperate fully with the investigation conducted by law enforcement officials and/or child protective services.

2. Address any needs the child or youth may have, medical or otherwise. The Senior Pastor (or if the Senior Pastor is suspected to be involved in such abuse, the District Superintendent) shall immediately report to the parent(s) and/or legal guardians(s).
3. The person suspected of abuse (respondent) shall, for the safety and well-being of the children or youth, be removed with dignity from further contact with the children and youth until an appropriate investigation has taken place. The matter shall remain confidential to the extent possible.
4. Following the report of an incident, the event leader shall document the report, and then speak with the alleged victim, being careful to use open-ended questions.
5. All such conversations shall be documented. Careful and confidential documentation is essential. The documentation should include the following:
 - a. The name of the leader observing or receiving the disclosure of abuse, including the date, time and place and any action taken by this person.
 - b. The alleged victim's name, age, and date of birth.
 - c. Any statement made by the alleged victim.
 - d. Name of the respondent, the date, time and place of any conversation or any statement made by the respondent.
 - e. Any action taken, i.e. suspension of the respondent.
 - f. Date and time of call to the appropriate agency, name of worker spoken to, content of that conversation and case number assigned.
 - g. Date and time of call to law enforcement agency, name of officer spoken to and content of that conversation.
 - h. Date and time of any other contacts made regarding this incident.
6. The Senior Pastor (or, if the Senior Pastor is the respondent, the head of the PPR Committee) shall notify the Conference/District authorities.
7. It shall be the goal to provide supportive care to both the victim and the respondent and to restore such persons to wholeness. Supportive care can include the procedures of the criminal justice system, provisions of the current *Book of Discipline*, appropriate counseling referrals and continued pastoral visitation.
8. Confirmed reports of proven incidents of abuse shall be retained in a confidential Church file for future screening purposes.

Media Response

If investigations or allegations of abuse should come to the attention of the media, a response shall come from the Senior Pastor or a spokesperson designated by the Senior Pastor. Refer all inquiries to the Senior Pastor or the spokesperson. Do not give out any information; simply state that all inquiries will be answered by the Senior Pastor or the spokesperson.

**ST. PAUL'S UNITED METHODIST CHURCH
SAFE SANCTUARY VOLUNTEER APPLICATION**

Name: _____

Address: _____

Daytime phone: _____ Evening phone: _____

Occupation: _____

Employer: _____

Current job responsibilities and schedule: _____

Previous work experience: _____

Previous volunteer experience: _____

Special interests, hobbies, and skills: _____

How many hours per week are you available to volunteer? _____ Days _____ Evenings _____ Weekends _____

Can you make a one-year commitment to this volunteer role? _____

Do you have your own transportation? _____ Do you have a valid driver's license? _____

Do you have automobile liability insurance? (List policy limits and name of carrier) _____

Why would you like to volunteer as a worker with youth? _____

What qualities do you have that would help you work with youth? _____

Have you ever been charged with, convicted of, or pled guilty to a crime, either a misdemeanor or a felony (including but not limited to drug-related charges, child abuse, other crimes of violence, theft, or motor vehicle violations)? No Yes

If yes, please explain fully: _____

Would you be available for periodic volunteer training sessions? No Yes

References: Please list three personal references (people who are not related to you by blood or marriage) and provide complete address and phone information for each. References are confidential.

1. Name: _____
Address: _____
Phone: _____
Relationship to reference: _____

2. Name: _____
Address: _____
Phone: _____
Relationship to reference: _____

3. Name: _____
Address: _____
Phone: _____
Relationship to reference: _____

**ST. PAUL'S UNITED METHODIST CHURCH
POLICY COMPLIANCE STATEMENT**

I, _____, by my signature below, affirm that I have read and understand the attached **ST. PAUL'S UNITED METHODIST CHURCH SAFE SANCTUARY POLICY**, and I agree to abide by the terms and conditions stated therein.

SIGNED: _____
Signature of Applicant

PRINTED NAME: _____

DATE EXECUTED: _____

**ST. PAUL'S UNITED METHODIST CHURCH
AUTHORIZATION AND REQUEST FOR CRIMINAL RECORDS CHECK**

I, _____, hereby authorize St. Paul's United Methodist Church to request any law enforcement department, or another company or entity and their respective employees to release information regarding any record of charges or convictions contained in its files, or in any criminal file maintained on me, whether said file is a local, state, or national file, and including but not limited to accusations and convictions for crimes committed against minors, to the fullest extent permitted by state and federal law. **I do release said law enforcement department, or other company, from all liability that may result from any such disclosure made in response to this request.**

Print Applicant's full name: _____

Print all other names that have been used by applicant (if any): _____

Date of birth: _____ Place of birth: _____

Social Security number: _____ Driver's license number: _____

State issuing license: _____ License expiration date: _____

List each address at which you have resided in the last five years.

Address: _____

Address: _____

Address: _____

Signature of Applicant

Date