Jones Memorial United Methodist Church
Safe Sanctuary Policy

Reducing the Risk of Abuse in Children, Youth, Vulnerable Adults

Approved by Church Council and Initiated, (March 1, 2018)

I. Introduction, Safe Sanctuaries Policy

In April 1996, The General Conference of the United Methodist Church adopted a resolution aimed at reducing the risk of sexual abuse of youth and children in the church. In 2004, the Holston Annual Conference also adopted a resolution requiring each congregation to develop a Child Abuse Prevention Policy. These resolutions are grounded in scripture.

Jesus said, "Whoever welcomes a child…welcomes me" (Matthew 18:5). Children are our present and our future, our hope, our teachers, our inspiration. They are full participants in the life of the church and in the realm of God. Jesus also said, "If any of you put a stumbling block before one of these little ones… it would be better for you if a great millstone were fastened around your neck and you were drowned in the depth of the sea" (Matthew 18:6). Our Christian faith calls us to offer both hospitality and protection to the most vulnerable among us.

God calls us to make our churches safe places, protecting children and other vulnerable persons from sexual and ritual abuse. God calls us to create communities of faith where children, youth, and adults grow safe and strong. *(From the Book of Resolutions of The United Methodist Church, pages 180-181, 2000, United Methodist Publishing House, 2000.)*

Jones Memorial United Methodist Church (JMUMC) establishes this Safe Sanctuaries policy to demonstrate our absolute and unwavering commitment to the physical safety, mental well-being and spiritual growth of all our children and youth.

Therefore, as a Christian community of faith and a United Methodist congregation, we pledge to maintain a Safe Sanctuary throughout all Church organized functions and programs. JMUMC Child Development Center (CDC) will follow their own child protection policy as approved by the Department of Human Services (DHS). Other outside groups using church facilities (i.e. Scout troops and the like) shall be furnished a copy of this Safe Sanctuaries Policy and encouraged to follow it, unless they have their own children and youth protection policy. A copy of the outside group's policy should be given to the church and kept on file.

II. Recruitment, Screening and Selection of Workers

The following forms must be completed by prospective volunteer or paid staff applicants:

1. Application and Covenant Statement - Appendix C
2. Authorization and Consent for Release and Disclosure Form - Electronic Form (to allow for criminal and sexual backgrounds checks to be run)

This information should be submitted by the applicant to the Pastor, Director of Children Ministries, or Director of Student Ministries.

A confidential file on each volunteer will be maintained in the church office in a locked cabinet. Confidential files of paid staff employees will be maintained in the office of the Pastor.

Criminal background checks and reference checks should be done on employed workers. Any criminal background check information that raises concerns of the Pastor will be discussed with the appropriate program staff. It is the intent of this policy that any actions will err on the side of protecting our children, youth and vulnerable adults.

Prior to beginning work as a volunteer or paid staff with children, youth, or vulnerable adults, an applicant should complete Safe Sanctuary training as described in this policy. Completion of this training will be documented, and records of this training will be kept in the main office.

Any volunteer who is accused of criminal or otherwise inappropriate actions, must report it to the Pastor. The team has the right to remove any volunteer from their role.

III. Procedures and Rules for Working with Children and Youth

The following procedures outline the prevention strategy in this Safe Sanctuaries Policy:

1. Participation Covenant
   All workers (volunteer and hired) must agree to and sign a Participation Covenant before volunteering with children or youth (see Appendix C).

2. The Two Adult Rule
   No fewer than two adults shall be present with each group of children or youth for any church sponsored program, event, or ministry. For the purpose of this rule, married couples working with the same group are considered one adult. If a second adult is not available during times of major use at the church (Sunday school, Sunday nights and Wednesday nights) an adult may supervise the groups by "floating" in the area. All children and youth classroom doors have a window in them for purposes of safety and security. Two adults are required on all trips and outings. If the trip is an overnight event, two adults of each gender represented within the group are required. One-on-one contact between adults and children or youth is not permitted. When situations require personal conferences, meetings should be conducted in view of other adults, children or youth or in a public place. Specific bathroom procedures vary according to age and ministry, read below for details.

3. Bathroom Procedures for Children's Ministry

   a. Nursery – Birth to age 2: Nursery workers shall follow the diaper changing procedure posted in the church nursery.

   b. Preschool – Age 3-PreK: If a child needs assistance while in the bathroom, one volunteer may assist but the door must remain open. If a bathroom has two entrances, one volunteer may stand in the first entrance, while holding the door open. If a volunteer needs to go into the bathroom, another volunteer should be present.

   c. Elementary – K- 5: Group bathroom breaks are encouraged, should a child need a separate bathroom break, one volunteer should escort the child to the bathroom and remain outside the hallway bathroom door.

4. The 18-Age Limit Rule
   Persons hired to work with children must in a be at least 18 years of age. When hiring youth workers, the 5-Year Older rule must be followed. In the children's area, at least one volunteer or paid worker must be age eighteen or older. Teen helpers who are in senior high or older may substitute as one adult required under Rule 1, for children's ministry only.

5. Five Year Older Rule
   Any worker, youth or adult, volunteer or paid, must be at least five years older than the group with which they are to work. This rule shall not prevent persons who do not meet this criterion from participating in events, trips and outings with younger persons.

6. Security Procedure for Children's Ministry Check In
   Children are checked in and out by a member of the Children Ministry Team. All needed information is collected at the first visit. If a problem occurs or parent is needed, a text message will be sent to alert them. A child can only be released to someone over the age of 18 and on the Approved Pick up list. A Permission Consent Form must be completed to allow for anyone under the age of 18 to pick up a child. A written note can be given to add someone to the Approved Pick Up List. This can be done via a verified text message, email, or written note from parent or guardian. Child care workers and Ministry Team Leaders have been instructed in these procedures.

7. Transportation Rule
   When transporting children or youth the Two – Adult rule must apply plus there shall be one adult, at least 25 years of age and with a valid driver's licenses, in any personal-owned vehicle or church-owned vehicle transporting children or youth for any church-sponsored event, program or ministry. Drivers must have a good driving history and must add a Motor Vehicle Report check along with their background check. For each van trip, a complete list of riders should be recorded. A copy of this list should be left in the church office.

   When using contracted transportation that includes a hired driver, one adult from JMUMC, 18 years or older, must accompany the group. All other van or vehicle requirements shall apply.

8. Six-Month Rule
   In order to be eligible to work with children and youth, volunteers should have regularly attended JMUMC for six months. This rule shall not prevent parents from visiting and participating in activities of their children. If an individual does not attend JMUMC for a year or more they must also wait the six-months and have updated background check completed prior to working with children and youth. Please understand that some exceptions could apply for special situations.

9. Advance Notice Rule
   Children and Youth ministry leaders shall always give the parents advance notice and full information regarding the event(s) in which their children or youth will participate.

10. Parental Permissions
    For off-site events, overnight events or those that require transportation, parents must give written permission for their

child's participation. Generally, personal information forms serve as written permission and shall be completed annually and updated as needed. These forms should be maintained by the staff or volunteer person responsible for age-level ministries. When traveling off-site for events outside of Chattanooga, the leader of the event should carry copies of permission forms and health forms with them.

11. State Reporting Rule
    Any suspected cases of child abuse must be reported to the proper authorities in the county the incident occurred and Hamilton County. JMUMC will use the Report of Suspected Incident of Child Abuse form (Appendix F) to record necessary information regarding allegations of abuse. This form is to be completed after the report has been made to the proper authorities. A copy of the report should be attached to this form.

12. Photographing Children and Youth
    Pictures may be taken during any event for youth and children at JMUMC and used for ministry purposes. No identifying names shall be displayed on the church website or social media (this includes a "no tagging" rule for children or youth on church sites). JMUMC is committed to protecting youth and children and their identity from being displayed or used inappropriately. Parents, Volunteers or Staff should not post pictures of children in church-sponsored activities (other than their own children) on their personal sites without express permission from the child's parents.

13. Church Sponsored Web Sites/Social Media
    Church-authorized social networking, blogging and web sites are used to convey information about JMUMC, communicate with members and fulfill the church's mission. A site must have more than one staff member or church-designated volunteer serving as authorized administrators and should monitor church sites regularly.

    When communicating through social media, JMUMC should ensure that content is appropriate at all times, reflecting the church's Christian identity and values. The publication of confidential information is prohibited. Any content deemed inappropriate will be deleted.

    Church staff shall not "friend" any child under age 13 or the minimum age required by the social networking site. Volunteers are discouraged from communicating via social media with anyone under the age of 18 except through church-sponsored social media sites, pages or groups. (For example, volunteers "friending" minors on Facebook is discouraged).

14. Sexual Harassment
    Sexual Harassment is defined as any unwanted sexual comment, advance, or demand, either verbal or physical, that is that is reasonably perceived by the recipient as demeaning, intimidating, or coercive. Any Incident of Sexual Harassment needs to be reported to the Pastor or Staff-Parish Relations Committee (SPRC).

15. Vulnerable Adult's Physical or Mental Welfare
    The Physical and Mental Welfare of Adults with Special needs and our Elderly is really important to JMUMC. Anyone who visits individuals considered to be Vulnerable Adults in a church capacity should have a completed Criminal Background check on file in the church office in a locked- cabinet and take the Safe Sanctuary Training. Any incident of abuse should be reported to the Pastor or SPRC.

IV. Implementation of the Safe Sanctuaries Policies and Procedures

Jones Memorial United Methodist Church is committed to:

1. Provide an annual Safe Sanctuaries Policy orientation for volunteer workers, staff, and parents. This is an educational opportunity for the congregation and its leaders on the reality of child abuse, risk factors leading to child abuse, and strategies for prevention.

   A recording of the training may be used to train anyone who cannot participate in the annual orientation. All children and youth ministry workers (volunteer or paid) must read the Safe Sanctuaries Policy and sign the Participation Covenant (Appendix C). The Director of Children Ministries and Director of Student Ministries shall be responsible for ensuring the annual orientation takes place.

2. Follow the screening procedures (use of application forms, interviews, and background clearance) for workers (paid and volunteer) directly or indirectly involved in the care of children and youth.

3. Maintain safety procedures for church activities including:

a. have two or more non-related adults present in classrooms or activities
b. leave doors open and keep windows in doors or halls unobstructed
c. utilize hall monitors, including the scheduled ushers
d. enforce sign-in and sign-out procedures for children

4. Advise children and young persons of an agency or a person outside, as well as within, the local church whom they can contact for advice and help if they have suffered abuse.
5. Carry liability insurance that includes sexual abuse coverage.
6. Assist the development of awareness and self-protection skills for children and youth through special curriculum and activities.
7. Review annual conference and other church policies regarding clergy sexual misconduct.
8. When an accident (cut, scrape, fall, etc.) involving a child or youth occurs resulting in an injury, the lead person should complete the Accident Report Form (Appendix D) and meet with one of the ministry staff to review the details as soon as possible. The review should focus on developing steps that would prevent a similar accident from reoccurring. The Accident Report Form and the minutes from the Accident Review meeting should be filed by the ministry staff. Blank copies of the Accident Report forms are available in every children's ministry classroom and in the church office.
9. Other serious incidents, excluding abuse (which shall be documented according to directions in Section V of this policy), should be documented on the Incident Report form (Appendix E). Questionable behavior that is witnessed at any time with an infant, child or youth on church property or on a church sponsored event must be reported. (Examples of such incidents might include fighting, stealing, alcohol or drug use.) Incident reports shall be maintained in a confidential file in the Senior Minister's office. Records of incidents shall be destroyed after a period of 18 months after an incident takes place. Blank copies of the Incident Report forms are available in the church office.
10. This Safe Sanctuaries policy should be reviewed each year by a Safe Sanctuary Team comprised of the Senior Pastor, the Director of Children Ministries, the Director of Student Ministries, Trustee Member, SPRC Member, and a Member of the CDC Board or Director. Changes must be approved by the Church Council.
11. All questions or concerns regarding policies or policy compliance should be reported first to the department head, if the concern continues, then report to Pastor, who will take to Trustees if needed. If reporting a policy violation, please report to department head and pastor. The Pastor will take to Trustees or SPRC if needed. If reporting abuse, please following the chain of command listed in the Responding to Allegations of Abuse section.

If you have any questions regarding the Safe Sanctuaries Policies and Procedures as set forth by JMUMC, please do not hesitate to contact the Pastor or Children & Student Ministry staff in the church office at 423-624-6073.

V. Responding to Allegations of Abuse

Why Implement a Plan to Report Abuse?

Because our church is a community of faith, a safe haven and sanctuary where children and youth can be confirmed and strengthened in the way that leads to life eternal.

What is Abuse?

Abuse may include Physical Abuse, Emotional Abuse, Neglect, Sexual Abuse, or Ritual Abuse.

Three million incidents of child abuse are reported each year. That equates to one incident every ten seconds around the clock, seven days a week.

Who are Abusers?

Abusers are not easily recognizable, for they may look just like you and me. Abusers are people who have greater power in relation to a child or youth, and they use that power to harm children and youth.

Without a comprehensive strategy against abuse, we are taking a needless risk that harm may be done to our children, youth, families, children and youth workers, the congregations and family of the abuser. Every volunteer and paid worker with children and youth should be trained regarding Tennessee requirements for reporting abuse to law enforcement authorities and child protection services.

Reporting a Suspected Incident of Child Abuse

Every volunteer and staff person working with children, youth or vulnerable adult should be trained regarding Tennessee requirements for reporting abuse to law enforcement authorities and child protection services. With any incident at JMUMC, the Tennessee authorities shall be notified. (See Appendix A) If an alleged incident of abuse involving church activities happens away from the church, then the incident must be reported in that jurisdiction as well as your local jurisdiction. Volunteers or staff members who suspect abuse of a child, youth, or vulnerable adult in a non-church situation are also obligated to report the alleged incident to the appropriate authorities.

How an adult responds to a child when he or she tries to disclose abuse can influence the outcome of the child's victimization. By maintaining an apparent calm, the adult can help assure the child that everything is going to be okay. By not criticizing the child, any statements the abuser made to the victim about the child getting into trouble can be counteracted. The adult should reassure the child of concern about what happened and tell the child that help will be sought. Allegations must be reported to the proper authorities, and the child or youth should be told that the proper authorities will be advised but no one else will be told. **It is very important that no one, except child protective services (and if applicable one of the persons listed below), be told about allegations of abuse – if the allegations cannot be substantiated, one can be sued for defamation of character.**

When reporting to law enforcement authorities, one is not required to know for certain that a child has been abused, only to have a reasonable suspicion and make the report in "good faith." When these requirements are met, all states provide immunity from civil and criminal liability for reporting child abuse. However, it is important to understand that no immunity is afforded for reporting or mentioning the suspicion or allegation to other persons.

Allegations by a child concerning abuse in a church-related activity must also be reported to one of the individuals listed below. This occurs immediately following the notification of state authorities of an allegation of abuse. A committee will be immediately convened to investigate the allegation.

The Committee will be composed of the following people:

- Senior Pastor
- Trustees Member
- Director of Student Ministries
- Director of Children Ministries
- SPRC Member
- CDC Director or Member

This committee will not wait for a time when everyone can be present, but will initiate its meeting as soon after the alleged incident as possible, but no more than 24 hours after the initial report. Proceedings shall be conducted confidentially, in a way that protects the rights of the alleged victim, the family and the accused, including their privacy. Legal immunity only exists for initial reporting directly to a child abuse hotline, law enforcement or child protective services.

The committee will first assure the alleged abuser has been removed from contact with the alleged child or youth victim. The committee will next assure that all reporting requirements have been met. The Report of Suspected Incident of Child Abuse (See Appendix F) shall be used to record action taken. It is imperative that the person filling out this report be familiar with Tennessee law, as well as legal liability for defamation of character and invasion of privacy, before taking any action or completing the report. The committee will take action to gather all necessary information regarding the incident, while taking all necessary precautions not to interfere with any official investigation.

The senior pastor, or their designee, will contact the Holston Conference Crisis Team who will be responsible for dealing with the media. The senior pastor or designee will be the spokesperson within the congregation. If the alleged abuser is a pastor, the Holston Conference Reporting Procedure shall be followed (Appendix H). With guidance from a legal professional, the Senior Pastor shall initiate appropriate ministries and actions over a long period to enable healing by all affected persons. Our goal is to always strive to protect the rights of the victim and the accused.

VI. Safety and First Aid

First Aid kits and Accident Report Forms are available in the following locations:

- Children Ministry Rooms
- Youth Ministry Rooms
- Kitchen
- Pioneer Kitchen
- Staff Offices

Appendix A – State Law on Reporting Child Abuse
Appendix B – Holston Conference Safe Sanctuaries FAQs
Appendix C – Application and Covenant Statement
Appendix D – Accident Report Form
Appendix E – Incident Report Form
Appendix F – Report of Suspected Incident of Child Abuse
Appendix G – Types and Indicators of Child Abuse
Appendix H – Holston Conference Abuse Report Info