

2016 – Reviewed and Approved

Safe Sanctuary Policy
Sunset Drive United Methodist Church
Broadway, Virginia

The General Conference of The United Methodist Church, in April 1996, adopted a resolution aimed at eliminating any potential for child sexual abuse in the church. The adopted resolution includes the following statement:

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 little ones, the children. The Social Principles of The United Methodist Church state that "...children must be protected from economic, physical and sexual exploitation and abuse." (para. 162C)

Tragically, churches have not always been safe places for children. Child sexual abuse, exploitation and ritual abuse (ritual abuse refers to abusive acts committed as part of ceremonies or rites; ritual abusers are often related to cults, or pretend to be) occur in churches, both large and small, urban and rural. The problem cuts across all economic, cultural and racial lines. It is real, and it appears to be increasing. Most annual conferences can cite specific incidents of child sexual abuse and exploitation in their churches. Virtually every congregation has among its members adult survivors of early sexual trauma.

Such incidents are devastating to all who are involved: the child, the family, the local church and its leaders. Increasingly, churches are torn apart by the legal, emotional, and monetary consequences of litigation following allegations of abuse.

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 and adults grow safe and strong. (From *The Book of Resolutions of The United Methodist Church*. P. 384-386)

Thus, in covenant with all United Methodist congregations, Sunset Drive United Methodist Church adopts this policy for the prevention of child abuse in our church.

Purpose

Our purpose for establishing this Child Abuse Prevention Policy and accompanying procedures is to demonstrate our total and unwavering commitment to the physical, emotional and spiritual safety of all our children, youth, and vulnerable adults.

Covenant Statement

Sunset Drive United Methodist Church hereby pledges to conduct the ministry of Jesus Christ in ways that assure the physical and emotional safety and spiritual growth of all of our children and youth as well as all of our workers with children and youth. We will follow reasonable safety measures when selecting and recruiting workers; we will implement prudent operational procedures in all areas of programming and care; we will train our workers with

children and youth on our procedures and policies; and we will have a clearly defined procedure for reporting a suspected incident of abuse that conforms to the requirements of the Commonwealth of Virginia law.

Staff SELECTION Policies

All volunteer and paid staff who work with children and youth at SUMC will be:

- Must be at least 16 years of age. Volunteers under the age of 18 must work with and under the supervision of an adult volunteer.
- Youth volunteers (under the age of 18) must have signed parental permission (on screening form and volunteer agreement) before they can be authorized to serve with children, youth, and/or vulnerable adults.
- A member or attendee of SDUMC for at least 6 months.

All volunteer and paid staff who work with children and youth at SDUMC will:

- Complete and sign an Authorization and Release for the Procurement of a Criminal Records Screening form giving permission to check background information.
- Undergo a criminal background check at no expense if they will have supervisory program responsibility for children/youth. Individuals who have been convicted of physical or sexual abuse or neglect may not work in any church-sponsored activity or program for preschoolers, children, youth or vulnerable adults.

Staff SUPERVISION Guidelines

Whenever supervising activities involving children and youth at SDUMC,

- Two non-related adults will be present at all times, if at all possible. In such cases where this may be a hardship (e.g., lack of adequate volunteers) the next step will be implemented:
- An adult roamer will frequently visit the children/youth event, e.g., during Sunday School hour or Children's Church
- Children and youth will be checked in to and out of a church sponsored activity by their parent or legal guardian or people authorized by parent/legal guardian.
- They will have access to a telephone or cell phone when groups are at or away from the church facility
- One-on-one interactions with children and youth will be with an open door and visibility to all.

Whenever SDUMC sponsors an activity involving children or youth,

- Anyone has the right to visit and observe the children's/youth activity, classroom, or church-sponsored program at any time, unannounced.
- All classroom and office doors will have a window or visibility from hallway or remain open while occupied.
- Windows will be kept free from adornment

Whenever SDUMC transports children or youth away from the church facility,

- No youth should drive to/from events
- Adults should never transport child/youth by self
- Approved and covered by church's insurance company
- Drivers should go through same screening process as all other paid/volunteer staff

Whenever SDUMC hosts an activity involving children or youth from another church or community organization,

- The groups using the church facility will follow SDUMC's Safe Sanctuaries policies and procedures

Whenever children and youth participating in out-of-area and over-night outings

- They must have written consent and a notarized medical release form. (Medical release and consent forms may be completed for a one-year period and must be renewed annually).
- There must be access to a phone, cell phone or pager when groups are away from the church property.
- If the outing involves water activities such as swimming, a certified lifeguard will accompany the group.

In no circumstance is one adult (other than the parent) to take a child or children on an overnight outing alone. On youth overnight outings, there will be a 1:7 staff: youth supervision ratio observed. Female staff will supervise female youth in their sleeping quarters and male staff will supervise male youth. Married couples will not stay together but observe the female/female and male/male sleeping arrangements. With the exception of a parent/child combination, a staff and youth will not occupy the same bed or sleeping bag.

SDUMC volunteer and paid staff will be given the opportunity to attend training about Safe Sanctuary policies, procedures and child abuse issues on a regular basis and should review/receive such training at least once a year

If a suspected incident of child abuse or neglect occurs at or is revealed to a volunteer/paid staff person at a SDUMC sponsored activity, the adult in charge of the activity will

- Insure the safety of the child or youth
- Call the church pastor or designee
- Call the County Office of DSS

Policy REVIEW

This policy shall be reviewed annually by the Ministry Council, Administrative Council and Trustees.

Conclusion

In all of our ministries with children, youth, and vulnerable adults, this congregation is committed to demonstrating the love of Jesus Christ so that each child, youth and vulnerable adult will be "surrounded by steadfast love...established in the faith and confirmed and strengthened in the way that leads to life eternal." (Baptismal Covenant II, *United Methodist Book of Worship*, p.96).

ONLINE SAFE SANCTUARY TRAINING OPTIONS:

<http://vimeo.com/14636182>

<http://kyumc.org/pages/detail/1282> (link to PowerPoint presentation)

Photo Permission/Release

I give Sunset Drive United Methodist Church permission to post pictures of my child/youth taken at Church events on bulletin boards within the Church facility. (please initial yes or no) _____Yes _____No

I give SDUMC permission to post pictures of my child/youth taken at Church events on the Church Webpage/social media sites. (please initial yes or no) _____Yes _____No

I give SDUMC permission to send pictures to the newspaper for the purpose of publicity. I understand that if names are used, my child's/youth's first name only will appear. (please initial yes or no) _____Yes _____No

AUTHORIZATION AND RELEASE FOR THE PROCUREMENT OF A CRIMINAL RECORDS SCREENING

Sunset Drive United Methodist Church is responsible for ensuring a safe environment at any and all Church events on behalf of children, youth and at-risk adults. To this end, SDUMC has implemented a "Child/Youth/At-Risk Adult Protection Policy" in order to:

- 1) Establish reasonable procedures to reduce the risk of physical, emotional and sexual abuse of our children, youth, and vulnerable adults as they participate in Conference events;
- 2) Protect our children, youth, and vulnerable adults; and
- 3) Protect our staff and volunteers from false allegations of misconduct.

All new and returning volunteers, must have a criminal record screening.

I understand and agree to the following:

1. A background check is not only for the benefit of the SDUMC as a sound practice, but also for the benefit of all who participate in ministry programs. It is no reflection on an applicant. I have read, understand, and signed the separate Disclosure concerning my rights.
2. All reports are confidential, and provided to SDUMC for the purpose of service within ministry settings only. If required as part of the screening, consumer credit information including credit reports are obtained in strict compliance with the Fair Credit Reporting Act, the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), anti-discrimination and privacy laws and all other applicable federal and state laws.
3. I may review or obtain a copy of my report as provided by law. Screening One may be contacted by writing to: Screening One, Inc., 2233 W. 190th Street, Torrance, CA 90504.
4. I authorize and release people, companies, references, current and former employers, schools, credit bureaus, municipal, county, state and federal agencies and courts, and agencies that provide motor vehicle records, to provide all information that is requested to SDUMC or Screening One.
5. I further release all of the above, including the SDUMC and Screening One, to the full extent permitted by law, from any liability or claims arising from retrieving and reporting information concerning me.
6. I agree that a copy or fax of this document shall be as valid as the original.
7. The information contained on this authorization/release form is true and correct and that my application or service may be terminated based on any false, omitted, or fraudulent information.

Your signature _____ Date _____

COURTS AND OTHER ENTITIES REQUIRE THE FOLLOWING INFORMATION FOR IDENTIFICATION WHEN CHECKING PUBLIC RECORDS. IT IS CONFIDENTIAL AND IS USED FOR IDENTIFICATION ONLY. YEAR OF BIRTH ENSURES ACCURACY AND AVOIDS DELAY.

First Name _____ Middle Name _____ Last Name _____

Social Security Number _____ DOB: ____/____/_____

Former Names _____ Name
Change(s) _____ Dates of Changes _____

Name on Driver's License _____ Driver's License or
I.D. Number _____ State of Issue _____