

Tennessee-Western Kentucky Conference of The United Methodist Church Safe Sanctuary Policy for Children, Youth, and Vulnerable Persons

Every congregation and agency in the Tennessee-Western Kentucky Conference of the United Methodist Church (TWK UMC) is expected to uphold this policy as its minimum standards in the establishment of its local Safe Sanctuary Policy for Children, Youth, and Vulnerable Persons.

Abuse and neglect of children, youth, and vulnerable persons are prohibited by the TWK UMC, its churches and its agencies.

The TWK UMC seeks to create a safe environment for children, youth, and vulnerable persons in which opportunities for abuse are minimized by the provision of proper enlistment and supervision of those persons working with them. This document contains theological foundations, definitions of abuse and common terms, policies and procedures related to prevention, response, and reporting.

Clergy and laity are encouraged to read this policy and make it an essential part of the operations of your local church. For more information or to seek clarity visit twkumc.org and go to the Safe Spaces Ministry page.

1. SCOPE

The Tennessee-Western Kentucky Conference of the United Methodist Church affirms that all children, youth and vulnerable persons have the right to safety. Therefore, United Methodists of the TWK UMC are determined to provide an environment in which these persons are safe from neglect or abuse including sexual misconduct and harassment.

The scope of this policy and its provisions shall apply to all staff and volunteers, clergy or lay, who have direct or indirect contact with children, youth, and vulnerable persons in conference and/or district sponsored events. This policy should be implemented in conjunction with the Sexual Misconduct Policy for Church Professionals found at twkumc.org on the Safe Spaces Ministry page.

The Safe Spaces Ministry in consultation with the appropriate governing authority shall be responsible for reviewing and revising this policy. Each conference and/or district ministry event involving children, youth, or vulnerable persons shall adopt procedures to implement this policy.

2. THEOLOGICAL FOUNDATION

Our Biblical Mandate:

“Then he [Jesus] took a little child and put it among them; and taking it in his arms, he said to them, ‘Whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me, and whoever welcomes me welcomes not me but the one who sent me.’” (Mark 9:36-37 NRSV) 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 NRSV)

Our Commitment in Baptism:

The Church, above all institutions, is called to welcome and nurture the child. Our goal is to maintain a safe, secure, loving place where all children may grow and where those who care for them may administer to their needs in responsible ways.

Our Mandate:

The 1996 General Conference approved a resolution that called upon local churches and annual conferences to institute policies and procedures to reduce the risk of child sexual abuse

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in our churches and church-related activities. We, in the TWK UMC, accept the nature of this call and seek to expand it to include all forms of abuse and neglect that could be possible in these settings or that could come to our attention regarding all children, youth, and/or vulnerable persons in our care.

Statement of Covenant:

As caring Christians, we are also committed to protect and advocate for all children, youth, and vulnerable persons participating in the life of the church. The Church, at all levels of its organization, is entrusted with the responsibility of providing an emotionally and physically safe, spiritually grounded, healthy environment for all children, youth, adults, and vulnerable persons in which they are protected from abuse.

We uphold the idea that to report abuse is to be a witness to the world of the love and justice of God and fully recognize that reporting abuse is a form of ministering to the needs of those crying out for help. Simply, to report abuse can help to stop existing abuse and prevent further abuse.

Additionally, we care for victims of abuse and their families by offering resources that will contribute to healing. Further, we recognize the grace that God gives in upholding Christian community; we will look for grace-filled ways of dealing with both the victim and the accused.

Therefore, as a Christian community of faith and a United Methodist entity, we pledge to conduct the ministry of the gospel in ways that assure the safety and spiritual growth of all of our children, youth and vulnerable persons, as well as all of the workers with children, youth and vulnerable persons. We will follow reasonable safety measures in the selection and recruitment of workers; we will implement prudent operational procedures in all programs and events; we will educate all of our workers with children, youth and vulnerable persons regarding the use of all appropriate policies and methods (including first aid and methods of discipline); we will have a clearly defined procedure for reporting a suspected incident of abuse that conforms to the requirements of state law; and we will be prepared to respond to media inquiries if an incident occurs.

3. DEFINITIONS

Delineation of Age

1. **Adults** are all persons who have attained the age of majority (18 years in Tennessee except for alcoholic beverage restrictions, and in Kentucky except for purchase of alcoholic beverages and for purposes of care and treatment of children with disabilities for which it is 21).
2. **Child** is generally defined as a person who is under 18 years of age.
3. **Children** are persons 0-11 years of age. Additionally defined as all persons from infants through the fifth grade or sixth grade, as determined by each local church in order to conform with grade-level practices of its local area schools regarding classifications of elementary schools and middle or junior high schools.
4. **Youth** are 12-18 years of age. Additionally defined as all persons in the sixth-grade or seventh-grade through the twelfth-grade, as determined by each local church in order to conform with grade-level practices of its local area schools regarding classifications of middle or junior high schools and high schools.
5. **Vulnerable persons** any adult aged 18 or over who, by reason of mental or other disability, age, illness or other situation is permanently or for the time being unable to take care of him or herself, or to protect him or herself against significant harm or exploitation.

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Definitions of Abuse

6. **Child abuse** is the harm or threatened harm to a child's health or welfare by a person responsible for the child's health or welfare or by a person in a position of trust, which harm occurs or is threatened through non-accidental physical or mental injury or sexual abuse.
7. **Vulnerable Persons abuse** is the harm or threatened harm to a vulnerable person's health or welfare by a person responsible for the vulnerable person's health or welfare or by a person in a position of trust, which harm occurs or is threatened through non-accidental physical or mental injury or sexual abuse. A vulnerable person is any adult aged 18 or over who, by reason of mental or other disability, age, illness or other situation is permanently or for the time being unable to take care of him or herself, or to protect him or herself against significant harm or exploitation.
8. **Physical Abuse** is any deliberate act that inflicts bodily harm to a person, or failure to protect from physical harm where a duty exists to do so.
9. **Neglect** is failure to provide nutrition, medical, surgical, or any other care necessary for the well being of the child, youth, or vulnerable persons.
10. **Sexual Abuse** is any sexual contact or sexually explicit language, gestures, or images by a volunteer or staff person with, or directed to, a participant.
11. **Child Sexual Abuse** occurs any time a child is used for the sexual stimulation of an adult or older child. A child is powerless either to consent to or resist such sexual acts. This includes fondling, sexual intercourse, forced participation in sexual acts, incest, exploitation for the purpose of pornography or prostitution, and/or exposure to adult sexual activity.
12. **Emotional abuse** is submitting a child, youth or vulnerable adult to verbal assault or emotional cruelty. Emotional abuse can include closed confinement (being shut in a small area), making racial remarks, excessive punishment, pervasive use of profanity in a denigrating or humiliating manner, knowingly permitting drug or alcohol abuse, ignoring or encouraging peer abuse.

Definitions of Roles

13. **Participants** are children, youth, adults, or vulnerable persons who are registered, enrolled, attending or otherwise participating in an event or activity sponsored by the conference or district.
14. **Staff** includes any United Methodist clergy person, any paid employee of the conference or a district, and any paid employee of any group, committee, team or agency of the conference or a district that has the care or supervision of a participant at an event.
15. **Supervision** is the ability for a person to be in charge of a group of children, youth, or vulnerable persons giving direction, setting boundaries, disciplining appropriately, maintaining safety and being the adult in all situations.
16. **Authority figure** is a person who is a primary leader of any children, youth, or vulnerable persons activity. Such person should be eighteen (18) years of age or older and at least 5 years older than the age group with which they are to work. It is strongly recommended that the second person serving in this role be at least twenty-one (21) years of age or older. This role requires extensive training in Safe Sanctuary and risk reduction such as that offered by TWK UMC.
17. **Adult Volunteer** is any non-clergy, lay worker who has the care/supervision of a participant at an event. This may include paid staff members of a local church. This role requires local church Safe Sanctuary training based upon the congregation's policy and procedures.
18. **Adult Helper** works temporarily, infrequently or indirectly with vulnerable people, and does not have any direct supervision role. Such person should be eighteen (18) years of age or older and at least 5 years older than the age group with which they are to work. This role requires situational briefing on policy and procedures related to the event.

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19. **Helper under age 18** is considered a child and, therefore, can serve in no role of authority over children, youth or vulnerable persons.

Definitions of Governance

20. **Conference** refers to the conference and/or its districts within the Tennessee-Western Kentucky Conference of the United Methodist Church.
21. **Governing body** refers to the local church leadership approved and elected by the annual Charge Conference of the local church and in compliance with *The Book of Discipline of The United Methodist Church 2016* (§243,244, and 247). Examples may include Church Council, Administrative Board, Board of Stewards, etc.
22. **Safe Spaces Ministry** consists of the Safe Sanctuary Team, the Boundaries and Sexual Ethics Team, and the Conference Response Team for the TWK UMC. The Safe Spaces Ministry serves to ensure that policies and procedures necessary for keeping ministry safe in order for sacred space to be created are developed, reviewed, appropriately presented and for training to be provided for members of the TWK UMC.

Definitions of Policy and Program

23. **Safe Spaces Verification Form** is completed specifically for District or Conference sponsored ministries because there are additional requirements for supervision at District/Conference sponsored ministry events. Examples of District/Conference sponsored ministry, a conference or district sponsored Mission trip, a conference or district retreat, such as confirmation or serving as a camp counselor.
24. **Sexual Misconduct Policy for Church Professionals** refers to the policy and procedures approved by the TWK UMC regarding boundaries and sexual ethics.
25. **Ministry Event** is defined as local church, conference or district sponsored activity or occasion that involves a gathering and care of children, youth, or vulnerable adults.
26. **National Background Screen** is the conducting of a search of publicly available websites through a third party contractor for information about criminal convictions of the applicant and whether the applicant's name appears on the National Sex Offender list.

4. ADOPTION OF POLICIES AND PROCEDURES

Local churches within the conference will adopt and enforce their own abuse prevention policies for children, youth, and vulnerable persons. It is recommended that each congregation's policy be consistent with the above-stated covenant with other United Methodist congregations (See **THEOLOGICAL FOUNDATION** in section 2 above). Furthermore, TWK UMC expects all congregational policies to be equal to or exceed in strength of protection for all children, youth, and vulnerable persons the minimum standards here stated. The TWK of UMC recommends the local church act as follows:

- A. **Responsibility for Implementation.** Implementing a Safe Sanctuary Policy for Children, Youth, and Vulnerable Persons at a local church shall be the responsibility of the Pastor in Charge, the governing body, and a Safe Sanctuaries Committee (SSC) or its equivalent organized in compliance with the local church's governance process.
- B. **Safe Sanctuaries Committee or equivalent.** A Safe Sanctuaries Committee or its equivalent shall have the responsibility for developing local church safe sanctuaries policy and procedures; communicating with and educating the congregation concerning those policies and procedures; recruiting, screening, and training paid staff and volunteers; conducting site inspections and making recommendations; retaining records; and regularly reviewing conference policies and procedures, applicable state laws, and the insurance policy provisions and insurer requirements. It is recommended that this committee or its

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equivalent should have at least one representative each from Education, Age-level ministries, Trustees, and the Staff Parish Relations committees.

- C. **Training.** Such periodic training and education on the Safe Sanctuary Policy for Children, Youth, and Vulnerable Persons provided by the TWK UMC should be attended each quadrennium by the local church Pastor in Charge and SSC chairperson or other SSC designated member. Further, it is recommended that attendance at such conference-wide training include at a minimum, designees from the local church who will be personally coordinating and conducting safe sanctuaries training for employees and staff within the local church.
- D. **Annual Review of Policy.** The local church Safe Sanctuary Committee will conduct an annual review of the policy to facilitate implementation of best practices and compliance with current state and federal law. A report will be made to the TWK UMC as a part of their charge conference report.

5. SCREENING PROCEDURES FOR VOLUNTEERS AND PAID STAFF

While this section on screening applies directly to Conference-sponsored events, it is recommended and encouraged as a minimum standard for local church and agencies Safe Sanctuary policy and procedures.

All persons, including Conference staff who intend to work with children, youth, and/or vulnerable persons at Conference-sponsored events, including overnight or longer events, must also be properly screened and attend an age-appropriate orientation/training session on child protection and abuse and have current background check. A Safe Spaces Verification form will be completed and submitted to the event leadership prior to participation.

The following procedures should be followed:

- Written job description and/or expectations provided and must be signed and dated.
- An application/personal information form shall be completed.
- A Sexual Offender Registry check in any state where the applicant has resided during the past seven (7) years.
- Must consent to authorizing criminal background check. A background check should be provided for anyone staying overnight or longer, i.e. weekend retreats, summer camps.
- A new background check should be performed every 3 years as the standard.
 - If the applicant is found to have been involved in any activity in which the applicant abused or exploited children, youth, or vulnerable persons the applicant will not be approved. Any conviction of a crime against children, youth or adults from vulnerable populations shall disqualify any applicant. A person who has been convicted as a sex offender will not be certified. Affirmative responses to the following questions relating to crimes will prompt a personal review of an application:
 - crimes against children,
 - rape, sexual or physical assault
 - possession or use of drugs, and
 - suspension of a driver's license within the last five years
- Personal interviews with summary documentation will be conducted by the Safe Sanctuary team or Conference staff representative and kept in a confidential file maintained by the Conference ministry for whom the applicant will serve.
- References will be checked with summary documentation in a confidential file and maintained by the Conference ministry for whom the applicant will serve.

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6. SAFE SPACES PROCEDURES

While this section on procedures applies directly to Conference-sponsored events, it is recommended and encouraged as a minimum standard for local church and agencies Safe Sanctuary policy and procedures.

- A. Appropriate Boundaries:** All persons, staff and participants, will maintain boundaries appropriate to their specific roles, age, and relationship to another.
- B. Two Adult Rule:** During all conference events one adult will not be alone with any number of children, youth, or vulnerable persons. For small group activities where one adult supervises one group, two or more groups are to meet in sight and sound of each other. The ministry leader may also decide to combine groups to ensure the safety of all parties. Small Group sizes will be determined by the size of the group but should not exceed reasonable adult/participant ratios. Risk will be reduced even more when the adults are unrelated.
- C. Five Year Older Rule:** Persons supervising children and/or youth will be at least 5 years older than the oldest child/youth participant. It is expected that all staff or volunteers for Conference sponsored events be at least 21 years of age or older and have completed a background check, interview with the ministry leader for the conference, and participated in training on the Safe Sanctuary Policy for Children, Youth, and Vulnerable Persons.
- D. Adult/Children Ratio:** The adult/children ratio will be dependent upon the age of the children groups present. Refer to the following protocol:
 - Children, ages 0-5 - 1 adult to 4 children or 2 adults to 8 children
 - Children, grades 1-6 - 1 adult to 6 children or 2 adults to 12 childrenNote: Day Care/Nursery programs must meet the respected codes of their state as the minimum ratio.
- E. Adult/Youth Ratio:** The adult/youth ratio will be at least 2:16 at retreats/rallies/meetings with the understanding that one adult will not be alone with any number of youth. The ratio for offsite camps and mission trips will be 2:10. Some events may require smaller ratios. If so stricter requirements will be communicated to all adults and churches prior to the event through registration confirmation packets as well as through emails and the conference youth website.
- F. Male/Female Adults:** When a group from any local church consists of both genders, the accompanying adults shall also be of both genders. This also applies to small groups and mission worksite groups.
- G. Open Doors:** Doors to meeting spaces without windows must remain open when children, youth, or vulnerable adults are utilizing the space. Doors with windows may remain closed provided that sight lines to all areas of the room are clear.
- H. Medical Release/Registration Form:** All persons attending age-level Ministry Conference events shall have a completed medical release form and completed parental permission form. The medical release form will be valid for a 1-year period beginning with the first event for which it is submitted. It is expected that a new form will be submitted if a change in medical status occurs. All forms will be maintained by the local church ministry leadership and will be available upon request for verification during Conference event check-in.
- I. Local Ministry Leader Responsibility:** It is expected that the children/youth coordinator/director from the local church maintain a copy of each attendee's form at all times. These forms should be carried with the group traveling to and from events.
- J. Check-In Procedure:** The local church ministry team should develop a consistent check-in procedure during the event to meet with the church group. These should be spread throughout the event and event day.
- K. Check-out/Event Pickup:** No child/youth will be released to anyone other than the parent whose signature has been provided without specific written direction by that parent and satisfactory identification of the person who will call for the child/youth.

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- L. Lodging for overnight youth events:** An adult and youth will not share a room/hotel/tent unless the adult is a parent of that youth with whom they are sharing the room/hotel/tent. No adult should share a bed with any youth.
- M. Lodging for overnight youth events at non-hotel sites:** There will be separate sleeping areas/rooms for males and females at all conference sponsored events. When there are several rooms/cabins of youth, there will be at least two adults of the same gender in the room/cabin.
- N. Parent/Guardian Housing Exemption:** An immediate family member or guardian of a young person who is chaperoning an overnight event is permitted to share a room and bed with his/her child no matter the gender as long as no other young people are sharing the room.
- O. Six Month Rule:** Any volunteer working with children must be a member or attend regularly in a local church, campus ministry, or approved extension ministry for at least six months. This shall be confirmed in writing by the pastor or ministry supervisor.

7. TRAINING AND SCREENING RECIPROCITY

The Safe Spaces Ministry Team may accept training provided by other United Methodist Conferences or United Methodist churches in other conferences after a review of the policies and procedures implemented in the other conference or church. Screening will be accepted provided that there has been a copy of the National Screen that included a national criminal check conducted by the other conference or church submitted with the request.

8. REPORTING OF INCIDENTS

This section on reporting applies directly to local church and to Conference-sponsored events, it is a minimum standard for local church and agencies Safe Sanctuary policy and procedures.

Incidents may involve inappropriate behavior by staff/volunteers or other participants toward a participant and call for immediate on-site corrective action. Incidents may involve the abuse, neglect or exploitation of participants by staff/volunteers or other participants and mandate reporting through the Tennessee Child Abuse hotline (1-877-237-0004) or the Adult Protective Services hotline (1-888-277-8366). In Kentucky - Statewide Abuse Reporting Hotline, 1-877-KYSAFE1 or 1-877-597-233. In case of an emergency, immediately call 9-1-1.

A call to the hotline is required to be made by staff/volunteers if there is reasonable cause to suspect that abuse of a participant has occurred. When the necessity of reporting occurs, the protection of children, youth, and vulnerable persons must be paramount. In Tennessee, cooperation with the Tennessee Department of Children's Services, the Tennessee Commission on Aging and Disability and law enforcement is required in all such incidents. In Kentucky, cooperation with the Cabinet for Health & Family Services, Division of Protection & Permanency and the Kentucky State Police or local law enforcement is required in all such incidents.

In case of allegations of abuse, the pastor, the District Superintendent and/or Bishop shall be notified immediately following notification of the appropriate state or local law enforcement authorities. The TWK UMC Safe Spaces Ministry Chairperson or Staff Person may also be notified in order to be of assistance. Parents or legal guardians may be notified in appropriate circumstances.

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9. STATEMENT TO THE MEDIA

The Media Crisis Response Plan should be enacted to ensure proper protocol is followed. The Bishop or alternate spokesperson shall provide conference and district ministry groups with guidelines for communications with media about the incident(s) which may have been reported.

10. REMINDER OF MINIMUM STANDARDS

Every ministry and congregation of the TWK UMC that relates to children, youth, and vulnerable persons in its programming or oversight shall adopt or create policies and procedures to prevent the risk of abuse and harm. The policy and procedures stated herein shall be considered the minimum standards for such policy adoption or creation.

Policy Draft Date: November 5, 2021

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SAFE SPACES VERIFICATION FORM**

This statement is between the local church listed and the TWK UMC of The United Methodist Church:

Conference/District Event:

Church:

Address:

City:

Contact Person:

Phone:

The following adults who are accompanying our children and/or youth to this ministry event have completed the requirements for participation as an adult attendee as prescribed by the TWK UMC and enacted as a part of this local church's staff/volunteer screening process. This includes a background check, reference check, training on the local church's Safe Sanctuary Policy and Procedures, as well as a review of the **TWK UMC Safe Sanctuary Policy for Children, Youth, and Vulnerable Persons**.

These background checks were completed through the conference office: ___Yes ___No

If No, please indicate background company.

(List Names)

The signatures below attest that the screening procedure & background checks were performed and the results were satisfactory, that the individuals have completed the local church's Safe Sanctuary training, and they have reviewed the TWK UMC Safe Sanctuary policy.

CHURCH PASTOR (signature and date required)

MINISTRY LEADER (signature and date required)

This form should be completed and returned to the Conference/District Event organizer at least 1 week prior to the start date of the event.