

Safety Policy for Children, Youth and Vulnerable Adults

St. Mark's United Methodist Church, Bethany, OK

Revised (February 2016, February 2018)

Introduction

Jesus said, "Whoever welcomes [a] child...welcomes me." (Matthew 18:5) He 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 those who cannot protect themselves.

In response to this call and action of the 2003 Oklahoma Annual Conference, we hereby commit ourselves as a community of faith to this policy of safety for children, youth, and vulnerable adults.

Purpose

The purpose of this policy is to address the safety of our children, youth and vulnerable adults at St. Mark's United Methodist Church and St. Mark's United Methodist Church sponsored events. This policy provides written guidelines regarding required screening and training for all paid workers and volunteers who work in programs for children, youth and vulnerable adults.

Statement of Policy

Therefore, as a Christian Community of faith and an Oklahoma United Methodist Congregation, 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. It is our policy to:

1. Follow reasonable safety measures in the selection and recruitment of workers
2. Implement prudent operational procedures in all programs and events
3. Conform our facilities to meet reasonable safety standards to reduce risk of harm or injury
4. Provide workers adequate training regarding the implementation of our policies, procedures, and preferred methodologies
5. Provide adequate supervision and support for workers as they are in ministry on our behalf
6. Educate parents and others in our congregation as to our policies and procedures
7. Have in place a clearly defined procedure for reporting instances of injury, harm or abuse that conforms to the requirements of state law
8. Maintain confidentiality and respond with compassion and integrity to needs as they present themselves following incidents of harm, injury, or abuse
9. Regularly review our policies and procedures to assure that they conform to current legal, health, and safety standards

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 person is "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 Hymnal*, p.44).

**Procedures for the Implementation of Safety Policies for Children, Youth, and
Vulnerable Adults of St. Mark's United Methodist Church, Bethany,
Oklahoma**

1. Follow reasonable safety measures in the selection and recruitment of workers

- A. All workers with children, youth, or vulnerable adults will have been active with their peers in the life of this congregation for at least six months.
- B. Every person working with children, youth, or vulnerable adults will complete an application form, sign a covenant, consent to a formal background check, and provide three non-family references to their character and relational skills. This information will be kept confidential and will be reviewed and updated every two (2) years from the time of the initial screening. Those who will drive church vehicles will additionally consent to a driving records check.
- C. The senior pastor shall submit to a background check and said results will be kept in accordance with Annual Conference policy.

2. Implement prudent operational procedures in all programs and events

- A. At least two non-related adults will be present for all activities, programs, and events for children, youth, or vulnerable adults. Leaders should never be alone, one-on-one with a child, youth, or vulnerable adult in an isolated or closed situation. If the adult leaders should find themselves in such a situation, they should remove themselves in a reasonable manner.
- B. The following ratios are to be observed in all activities, programs, and events with the understanding that at least two non-related adult workers or one adult worker and a monitor for more than one class must also be present:
 - a. 0 to 18 months 1:4*
 - b. 18 months to 2 years 1:4*
 - c. 2 and 3 years 1:6*
 - d. 3+, 4s and 5's 1:8*
 - e. Kindergarten through 5th grade 1:8*
 - f. Youth 1:10
 - g. Vulnerable Adults 1:12

*Note: Two adult workers will be present each Sunday morning for Sunday school classes of ages 0 through fifth grade.

- C. Young people ages 14-18 are welcome to serve as assistants to leaders when under direct adult supervision, with a coordinator's permission, provided that the young person is a minimum of 4 years older than the group with whom he or she will work. The adult supervisor may also be the leader.
 - a. Nursery volunteers will be a minimum age of 14.
 - b. At Vacation Bible School (or similar program), young people entering the 7th grade may serve as assistants to leaders when under direct adult supervision, with a coordinator's permission.
- D. To help assure two adults are available in a classroom, a monitor will check with leaders and offer assistance as needed during activities, programs and events. This hall monitor will provide the same background and reference information as the volunteer workers.
- E. A general permission form, medical release, and medical care proxy will be provided by parent(s) or guardian(s) each year. These forms will sufficiently grant permission to participate in all but extraordinary activities.
- F. Parents will be informed of details and will be asked to give permission for children and youth to participate in extraordinary ministry activities.
- G. Parents will be informed that, should their child become sick or become a discipline problem, they will be called to pick up the child.
- H. Leaders will see that parents are informed of any changes made in plans otherwise published, even at the last minute.

- I. Older children and youth are required to sign a covenant of expected behavior prior to all off-premises events or overnight events.
- J. Volunteers providing transportation for programs, activities, or events for children, youth or vulnerable adults will consent to a personal driver records check. Drivers are expected to follow all traffic laws and refrain from use of cellphones or other electronic devices while operating an occupied vehicle.
- K. All workers and volunteers will follow safe and sanitary procedures when changing diapers and caring for toilet needs of children. This includes proper disposal of diapers and suitable hand washing procedures.
- L. Sick children will be removed from nurseries and classes as soon as is practicable to avoid exposure to others. If a child has experienced fever, vomiting, or diarrhea in the 24-hours prior to the event, the child should not be brought to the nursery.
- M. When moving or setting up TVs, projectors or other heavy equipment, minors must be supervised. Any such movable equipment must be securely attached to its conveyance (ex. TVs belted or bolted to the cart).
- N. Unless church provided childcare or supervision is available, parents are expected to provide supervision for minors at all times.
- O. At least two people should accompany children to the playground area to provide supervision. At no time are children to be left alone in the playground area.
- P. Emergency exit plans and instructions for tornado safety are posted in appropriate areas of the building. The Board of Trustees is responsible for posting, reviewing and updating as needed.
- Q. In situations that may endanger children, youth, and vulnerable adults, a church staff person, worker, or program coordinator may institute a church lock-down.

3. Conform our facilities to meet reasonable safety standard to reduce risk of harm or injury

- A. Every classroom and office door will have a window providing a view of the interior. The windows are to be left unobstructed in any way.
- B. Toxic materials, including cleaning and other supplies, will be stored in appropriate facilities well out of the reach of children, youth, and vulnerable adults.
- C. Electrical outlets in children's classrooms will be covered when not in use.
- D. Child proof door locks will be put on all cabinets in children areas ministry unless cabinets are intended for children's use.
- E. Playground areas will be checked for dangers under supervision of the Trustees.
- F. The Board of Trustees will regularly check facilities for safety hazards and report annually to Church Conference.
- G. Access to children's area will be limited.

4. Provide for workers adequate training regarding the implementation of our policies, procedures, and preferred methodologies

- A. Before taking responsibility for children, youth or vulnerable adults, workers will be provided policies, procedures, and preferred methodologies for their review. Refresher training will be offered periodically.
- B. Paid staff workers with children, youth and vulnerable adults shall have First Aid/CPR training and other emergency training (tornado drills, fire drills, blood borne pathogens, etc.)

5. Provide adequate supervision and support for workers as they are in ministry

- A. Leaders and teachers will know to whom they can go for assistance whenever it is needed.
- B. Leaders and teachers will be recognized and affirmed by the congregation on a regular basis.

6. Educate parents and others in our congregation as to our policies and procedures

- A. Policies and procedures pertinent to a specific area will be available in an easily accessible location.
- B. All policies and procedures will be accessible to any church member. Copies can be found in the church office, the nursery, and on the website.
- C. From time to time throughout the year, portions of our policies and procedures may be published in our newsletter or distributed in our worship services.

7. Have in place a clearly defined procedure for reporting instance of injury, harm or abuse that conforms to requirements of state law

- A. Any significant instance of injury, harm, or abuse that occurs in the context of any of our ministries with children, youth, or vulnerable adults will be documented and reported immediately by the supervisor to the senior pastor, the lay leader, and the parent(s) in confidence. Any such instances involving clergy will also be reported to the district superintendent.
- B. Suspected child abuse of any kind, shall be reported immediately to the Department of Human Services as required by state law. The DHS Hotline number is **1-800-522-3511** and the local number is **405-767-2800**.

8. Respond with compassion and integrity to needs as they present themselves following incidents of harm, injury, or abuse

- A. When instances of injury, harm, or abuse occur, the lead pastor, lay leader or other congregational leaders (as seem appropriate for the situation), will take the lead in determining the need for pastoral care ministry and will coordinate its implementation.
- B. The lead pastor or lay leader, working in concert, will act as official spokespersons for our congregation with the community and the media. When media are involved, the appropriate official(s) of the Annual Conference will be notified as soon as practical.

9. Regularly review our policies and procedures to assure that they conform to current legal, health, and safety standards

- A. There shall be a local church Safety Task Force, appointed by the Trustees, whose purpose shall be the enforcement and regular review of these policies and procedures. Said Safety Task Force is charged with making sure this congregation is doing everything in its power to keep children, youth, and vulnerable adults safe.
- B. Annually the Safety Task Force will conduct a "Safety Audit" to assess adherence to our safety policies and procedures in accordance to the "Resolution for the Safety of Children, Youth, and Vulnerable Adults in the Local Churches of the Oklahoma Conference of the United Methodist Church" and the "A Covenant for the Protection of Children, Youth, and Vulnerable Adults in Local Churches of the Oklahoma Annual Conference, The United Methodist Church May 2003" which were adopted at the Charge Conference held on November 27, 2005.
- C. Procedures and forms will be developed and expanded as necessary, and the congregation, staff, and volunteers educated during a preliminary implementation period through December 31, 2005. This policy will become fully effective as of January 01, 2006
- D. Nothing in this policy is to be construed in a way contrary to the Book of Discipline.



Volunteer Covenant

Mission: to build a family of believers who glorify God and help each other become fully devoted followers of Jesus Christ

Vision: renewing lives/restoring families/reviving the community

Plan: love with a passion, disciple with a purpose, worship with everything and serve wholeheartedly

St. Mark's offers a unique setting for ministry to and with children, youth and vulnerable adults. There is a special "assumed" covenant that is created when families entrust their loved ones to our care. Each child, youth or vulnerable adult is a person of immeasurable worth. As such, we must, at all times, abide by this assumed covenant and care for others in a Godly manner.

The calling of God to volunteer in one of these ministries is a high and holy calling. Through prayer and study, God equips us to carry out the responsibilities of being an instrument in leading others to know our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. In responding to this call, please commit yourself to the following guidelines and then return and sign the covenant.

As a volunteer with children, youth or vulnerable adults at St. Mark's UMC

I am committed to Jesus.

- I have a personal relationship with Jesus Christ, which I desire to model by sharing the stories of Jesus.
- I desire to grow in my faith and commitment to God through personal study or group Bible study opportunities.

I am committed to my church.

- I will attend worship service regularly.
- I will support the doctrinal beliefs of the United Methodist Church, as it relates to my teaching.
- I will use only approved curriculum and resources.
- I will frugally use the resources provided and will see that all supplies and equipment are taken care of and stored properly.
- I will follow directions and rules set up by church leadership.

I am committed to this responsibility.

- I will act in an appropriate and Christian manner with each person I come into contact with.
- I will at all times, act in ways that glorify and honor God.
- I will live by the understanding that, as a person in authority, it is my responsibility to avoid inappropriate physical contact with the children, youth or vulnerable adults in my care.
- I will refrain from verbal abuse, including put-downs, inappropriate jokes, sarcasm, and racial slurs.
- I will discipline with kindness and grace and will refrain from all forms of corporal punishment.
- I will make it my primary responsibility to minister to the needs of those in my care, and not my own.
- I will not intentionally engage in any activities that may endanger the safety or well-being of those in my care.
- I will promptly report any abusive or inappropriate behavior to the ministry leader.
- I have not been convicted or involved in any child-related felonies or abuse.
- I will inform and/or discuss with a minister of this congregation if I am a survivor of child abuse.
- I will participate in training events periodically to improve my teaching and/or volunteering skills.

In obedience to God's call, and after prayerful consideration, I commit to the above guidelines to be a volunteer with children, youth and/or vulnerable adults at St. Mark's UMC. In addition, I have read St. Mark's four page "Safety Policy for Children, Youth and Vulnerable Adults" and I commit to the guidelines outlined in it.

Your signature: _____

Date _____

Please print name here: _____

St. Mark's United Methodist Church
APPLICATION FOR WORKING WITH MINORS & VULNERABLE ADULTS

Our church cares about the minors and vulnerable adults in our programs, and desires to ensure their safety while they are in the church's supervision. Because we care for minors and vulnerable adults, our church asks any person who will be providing supervision/leadership with minors and vulnerable adults to complete this disclosure form. The information obtained on this form is for internal use by St. Mark's UMC only. Please answer each question below. **Your responses will be treated confidentially.**

Name (include middle initial): _____ Date of birth (Month/Day/Year) ____/____/____

List any other names used (e.g. maiden): _____

Current address (Include City, State, County): _____

List last 2 Addresses _____

Social Security Number _____

Home Telephone (include area code) _____ Business telephone _____

Occupation and current employer _____ Email Address _____

As an employee/volunteer at St. Mark's UMC, do you agree to observe all church policies regarding working with minors and vulnerable adults?YES NO

Have you ever been convicted of a criminal offense?YES NO

Do you have any criminal charges pending?YES NO

Have you ever been convicted of child neglect or abuse?YES NO

Do you have any charges of child neglect or abuse pending?YES NO

In addition to the above, is there any fact or circumstance involving you or your background that would call into question your being entrusted with the supervision, guidance, and care of children, young people, or vulnerable adults?
YES NO(If yes, explain in detail on a separate page, including dates and locations)

If you will be transporting minors or vulnerable adults:
Do you have a driver's license?YES NO

List the state and driver's license number: _____

List three references, other than family members, who are familiar with your character as it relates to working with minors and vulnerable adults. (Name, address, telephone number, relationship)

List all the churches you have attended regularly for the past 5 years. (Name and location)

List all the organizations through which you have volunteered with minors and/or vulnerable adults in the past 5 years (Include location)

Have you volunteered in church ministries before?YES NO

If yes, in what capacities? _____

The information that I have provided may be verified by contacting persons named on this application or by contacting any person or organization that may have any information concerning me. I hereby release and agree to hold harmless from liability any person or organization that provides information. I also agree to hold harmless St. Mark's United Methodist Church, and its paid staff members and volunteers. I waive any right to inspect any information provided about me by any person, organization, or investigative agency. In signing this application, I agree to be guided by the policies and regulations of St. Mark's United Methodist Church. I affirm that the information I have given on this form is true, correct and complete. By signing below I consent to a criminal and drivers record check to be conducted immediately and to be repeated periodically in the future.

Signature of applicant

Date