Policy for Children, Youth and Vulnerable Adults

St. Mark's Bethany – A Global Methodist Church
Bethany, OK

Introduction

Jesus said, "Whoever welcomes one such child in my name 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, 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 Bethany ("St. Mark's" or "the church"), including St. Mark's 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.

Applicability

This policy applies to all programming of the church for children, youth or vulnerable adults. Organizations that use St. Mark's facilities or partner with St. Mark's staff or volunteers, are likewise expected to have and enforce their own safety procedures. St Mark's is not responsible for enforcement of other organization's policies and procedures.

Definitions:

Children's Ministry: Programs sponsored by St. Mark's and led by church staff and/or volunteers for children ages birth through 5th grade.

Youth or Student Ministry: Programs and activities sponsored by St. Mark's and led by church staff and/or volunteers for children ages 5th grade through 18 years or high school graduation.

Vulnerable Adults: anyone over 18 years old whose physical or mental condition limits their ability to care for themselves or protect themselves from harm, including abuse, neglect, or financial exploitation.

Statement of Policy

As a Christian Community of faith, 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 the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ." (Ephesians 4:12-13)

Procedures for the Implementation of the Safety Policy for Children, Youth, and Vulnerable Adults
St. Mark's Bethany, 8140 NW 36th St, Bethany, Oklahoma

Roles and Responsibilities

1. **Leader:** salaried church employees who are responsible for implementation of these procedures. Selection of leaders will be made by the church staff parish relations committee in consultation with the senior pastor and approved by the church council.
2. Leaders of children, youth and vulnerable adults report to the senior pastor and currently includes:
    a. Children's Ministry – Sharon Hunt
    b. Children's Day Out LLC – Tracy Rogers
    c. Kings and Queen's LLC – position open
    d. Students/Youth Ministry Leader and Communidad Outreach Coordinator – Bequer Gomez
3. **Worker:** includes paid employees and unpaid volunteers who assist and report to a leader, and may include classroom teachers and hall monitors; and, volunteers who may provide services to vulnerable adults, including in their homes or other locations outside the church (such as Stephen Ministers).
4. **St. Mark's Safety Committee** members are appointed by the church council. The committee will include the leaders listed above in 2., the senior pastor,and three (3) laity. The safety committee responsibilities are further described in Procedure 9.

Procedures 1. – 9.

1. **Follow reasonable safety measures in the selection and recruitment of leaders and workers.**
    a. Every person working with children, youth, or vulnerable adults will complete an application form, sign a covenant of agreement (see attachments), complete MinistrySafe sexual abuse awareness training, 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 by the leader.
    b. Individuals who will drive church vehicles will additionally consent to a driving records check.
    c. The senior pastor shall submit to a background check every two (2) years from time of initial screening and the results will be reviewed by the Staff Parish Relations Committee.
    d. MinistrySafe software will be used to manage background checks, conduct sexual abuse awareness training and maintain evidence of the training. Administrators of the MinistrySafe software system include members of the safety committee, church administrator, and senior pastor.
    e. Documentation not kept in MinistrySafe will be confidentially maintained by the church administrator.

2. Implement prudent operational procedures in all programs and events

a. A safety committee will be appointed by the church council to provide oversight of the safety policy. See Procedure 9. for safety committee responsibilities.
b. Supervision. Ministry leaders are responsible for ensuring that the ministry program area is monitored during programming serving children, youth or vulnerable adults.
c. Access to children and youth: Only parents (dropping off children or staying to observe with leader approval), screened ministry leaders and workers, and children are allowed in areas where ministry to children is occurring. All other adults should be asked for identification and immediately escorted out of the area, or approved by a ministry leader to remain and observe on a case-by-case basis. If questions or concerns arise related to any person in the area, a leader should be notified immediately.
d. If you need to talk with a child/youth alone, do it in the hallway or a highly visible area, or have another leader with you.
e. Worker to child ratios. The following ratios are to be observed in all activities, programs, and events with the understanding that at least two adult workers or one adult worker and a monitor for more than one class must also be present:

i.	0 to 18 months	1:4
ii.	18 months to 2 years	1:4
iii.	2 and 3 years	1:6
iv.	3+, 4's and 5's	1:8
v.	Kindergarten through 5th grade	1:8
vi.	Youth	1:10
vii.	Vulnerable Adults	1:12

f. At least two leaders or workers must accompany children to the playground area to provide supervision. At no time are children to be left alone in the playground area.
g. 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.
h. Security cameras are installed in the children and youth meeting areas, and Barnett Hall, to record activities during Sunday school hours and other regularly scheduled programming times, including but not limited to Sunday mornings, Wednesday evenings, CDO, and Kings and Queens events, etc.
    i. Cameras are placed to assure room coverage while protecting personal privacy needs, such as the use of restrooms.
    ii. Parents will be informed that cameras may be in use.
    iii. Access to videos will be restricted to the senior pastor, administrator and staff leaders.
    iv. Trustees are responsible for maintenance of the cameras.
i. Student/youth assistants
    i. Young people are welcome to serve as assistants when under direct adult supervision by a leader or worker, with a leader's permission, provided that the young person is a minimum of 4 years older than the group with whom he or she will work.
    ii. Nursery assistants will be a minimum age of 14.

j. 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.
k. Parents will be informed in writing of details by the ministry leader and will be asked to give permission for children and youth to participate in extraordinary ministry activities.
l. Leaders will see that parents are informed of any changes made in plans otherwise published, even at the last minute.
m. Parents will be informed that, should their child become sick or become a discipline problem, including attempts to verbally, physically or emotionally bully another child, they will be called to pick up the child.
n. Older children and youth (6^{th} grade or higher), are required to sign a covenant of expected behavior prior to all off-premises events or overnight events.
o. All workers 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.
p. Workers will implement consistent procedures pertaining to the use of restrooms by children and/or changing a child's diaper.
    i. All adults taking children to the restroom, assisting a child in the restroom or changing a child's diaper must be in view of another adult.
    ii. Children that need bathroom assistance cannot be left unattended at the restroom or diapering station.
    iii. Special requests by parents will be accommodated when possible. If requested accommodations are not possible to implement, parents will be told as much in a timely manner.
q. Children who become ill 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 will not be allowed in the nursery.
r. Unless church provided childcare or supervision is available, parents are expected to provide supervision for minors at all times.
s. If working with or visiting a vulnerable adult in their home or outside the church, the best practice is to visit in teams of two or more. If it is not possible for another adult to be present, a member of the vulnerable adult's household should be present. If neither is possible, documentation of the time, duration of visit, general matters discussed, and any pastoral concerns shall be provided to the senior pastor or program leaders as soon as possible after the visit.

3. Conform our facilities to meet reasonable safety standards 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 and church facilities will be checked for dangers at least annually, under supervision of the trustees.
f. Children are not allowed in the kitchen unless attended by an adult.
g. Emergency exit plans and instructions for tornado safety are posted in appropriate areas of the building. The church trustees are responsible for posting, reviewing and updating as needed. Leaders are expected to review the plans at least annually with all workers.
h. In situations that may endanger children, youth, and vulnerable adults, a church staff person, program leader, or worker may institute a church lock-down.
i. Transportation* (*see also St. Mark's Van Use Guidelines)
    i. Children, youth and vulnerable adults should be transported directly to their destination. Unauthorized stops to a non-public place should be avoided.
    ii. Staff members and volunteers should avoid transportation circumstances that leave only one child, youth or vulnerable adult in transport.
    iii. No cell phones may be utilized by the driver while driving St Mark's vans, or vehicles owned or rented by St Mark's, unless in an emergency.
    iv. No drivers under age 25 may drive St. Mark's owned or rented vehicles.
j. After every ministry event, ensure that every room, area and restroom is checked prior to leaving, to assure no children or their belongings are left behind, and all items used for the event are removed or properly stored.

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 working with children, youth and vulnerable adults shall have annual First Aid/CPR training and other emergency training (tornado drills, fire drills, blood borne pathogens, etc.)
c. Ministry leaders will assure workers successfully complete required training.

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

a. Leaders and workers will know to whom they can go for assistance whenever it is needed.
b. Leaders and workers 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 will be posted on the church website: https://www.stmarksbethany.com/

b. The church safety committee or their designee, i.e. the church administrator, is responsible to assure the safety policy and procedures are accessible on the website (see procedure 9).

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 staff leader, or if the leader is not available then by the worker, to the senior pastor, the lay leader, and the parent(s) in confidence. Any such instances involving clergy will also be reported to the appropriate presiding elder of the Heartland Conference of the GMC.
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 **800-522-3511** and the local number is **405-767-2800**.
c. Because sexual abusers 'groom' children for abuse, it is possible that a staff member or volunteer may witness behavior intended to groom a child for sexual abuse. Please report 'grooming' behavior, policy violations, or any suspicious behaviors to a program leader or the pastor, such that the church may take appropriate action to safeguard children in the program.
d. ***NO PERMISSION IS NEEDED from St. Mark's before reporting to law enforcement personnel or the Child Abuse Hotline. In addition, a report may be made without involving or informing church personnel.***

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 will take the lead in determining the need for pastoral care ministry and will coordinate its implementation.
b. The lead pastor will act as official spokesperson for our congregation with the community and the media.
c. If the lead pastor is involved in the incident, then the church council will coordinate any response and the Global Methodist leadership will be notified.

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 Committee appointed by the church council.
b. The Safety Committee will:
    i. Develop and periodically review the safety policy and operational procedures; any changes will be approved by the church council.
    ii. Meet as needed and at least twice a year,
    iii. Periodically monitor church programs for ongoing compliance with these safety procedures.
    iv. Make recommendations to the church council regarding any changes needed to the safety procedures.