

Good Shepherd United Methodist Church Safe Spaces Policy

Good Shepherd United Methodist Church (GSUMC) seeks to create a safe environment for children, youth, and vulnerable persons. We seek to minimize the chances for abuse to happen to anyone. We will do this through the provision of proper enlistment and supervision of those persons working with them. This document contains theological foundations, definitions of abuse and common terms, and policies and procedures related to prevention, response, and reporting.

All participants, volunteers, and members of GSUMC are encouraged to read this policy and make it an essential part of the operations of the church. For more information or to seek clarity visit twkumc.org and go to the Safe Spaces Ministry page.

1. SCOPE

GSUMC affirms that all children, youth, and vulnerable persons have the right to safety. Therefore, United Methodists of the Tennessee-Western Kentucky Conference 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 individuals who have direct or indirect contact with children, youth, and vulnerable persons in GSUMC 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 Sanctuaries Board will review and revise this policy. All Ministries of GSUMC are responsible for implementing these policies.

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, and 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, GSUMC, 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 a space for all children, youth, adults, and vulnerable persons that is physically and emotionally safe, spiritually-grounded, a healthy environment, and 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 who are suffering from abuse. Simply put, reporting 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 all persons.

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, staff, and volunteers with children, youth, and vulnerable persons. We will follow reasonable safety measures in the selection and recruitment of workers, staff, and volunteers. We will implement prudent operational procedures in all programs and events; we will educate all of our workers, staff, and volunteers 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 for purposes of care and treatment of children with disabilities, for which it is 21).
2. **Child** is 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.
4. **Youth** are 12-18 years of age. Additionally defined as all persons in the sixth-grade through the twelfth-grade.
5. **Vulnerable persons** are 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 himself or herself, or to protect himself 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 himself or herself, or to protect himself 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 but is not limited to, 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 GSUMC.
14. **Staff** includes any appointed clergy and/or paid staff positions of GSUMC.
15. **Authority figure** is a person who is a primary leader of any children, youth, or vulnerable persons. 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 can be any non-clergy or lay worker who is entrusted with the care/supervision of a participant at an event. This may include paid staff members of GSUMC. This role requires training in this policy.

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

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.

Safe Sanctuaries Committee or equivalent: A Safe Sanctuaries Committee or its equivalent shall have the responsibility for developing GSUMC's 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 equivalent should have at least one representative each from Education, Age-level ministries, Trustees, and the Staff Parish Relations committees.

B. **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.

C. **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

All persons, 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.

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- 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, mission trips, and more.
- 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 assault, or physical assault
 - possession or use of drugs
 - 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 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 GSUMC ministry for whom the applicant will serve.

6. SAFE SPACES 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 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-to-participant ratios. Risk will be reduced even more when the adults are unrelated.
- C. Exceptions to Two Adult Rule:** If two adults are not able to be present in a classroom/Sunday school room, the door must remain open and one adult must serve as a "floater," checking in on every room at random intervals.
- D. Cameras:** Some rooms may have cameras for video footage. In these rooms, the camera cannot serve as a second adult. However, the camera may serve as a secondary floater. All camera footage will be deleted after 30 days.
- E. Three Years Older Rule:** Persons supervising children and/or youth will be at least 3 years older than the oldest child/youth participant. It is expected that all staff or volunteers will have completed a background check, interview with the GSUMC ministry leader and participated in training on the Safe Spaces Policy for Children, Youth, and Vulnerable Persons.
- F. Adult-to-Children Ratio:** The adult-to-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 10 children or

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2 adults to 20 children

Note: Day Care/Nursery programs must meet the respected codes of their state as the minimum ratio.

- G. Adult/Youth Ratio:** The adult/youth ratio will be at least 1 adult per 5 youth for all youth ministry events.
- H. Male/Female Adults:** When any GSUMC is participating in a multi-gender overnight event, there must be at least 1 adult of each gender.
- I. Bathrooms:** Children are to be escorted to the bathroom. However, adults will not enter the stall with the children, unless there is an emergency, or the child is in danger. Children will be escorted in groups of 2 or more, with at least 1 adult present, to the bathroom. In the event that a non-related adult enters the stall with a child, that adult must notify the child's parent/guardian and the ministry leader.
- J. 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.
- K. Medical Release/Registration Form:** All persons attending age-level 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 GSUMC and will be available upon request for verification during event check-in.
- L. Check-In Procedure:** GSUMC will maintain consistent check-in procedures throughout all ministry programming and all events.
- M. Check-out/Event Pickup:** Children/ will be released to only the individuals listed by the parent/guardian on the child's information form.
- N. Social Media and Technology:** This policy will apply to all social media and other technology-related forms of communication, including but not limited to, Facebook, Instagram, Group Me, Text Messages, and Phone Calls
- O. Lodging for overnight events:** Adults will not share a room/hotel/tent with a child or youth unless the adult is a parent of that child or youth with whom they are sharing the room/hotel/tent. No adult should share a bed with any youth or child.
- P. Lodging for overnight events at non-hotel sites:** There will be separate sleeping areas/rooms for males and females at all events. When there are several rooms/cabins of youth, there will be at least two adults of the same gender in the room/cabin.
- Q. 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.
- R. Six Month Rule:** All adult volunteer authority figures involved with children or youth of our church must have been members of the congregation for at least six months before beginning a volunteer assignment. Non-Members must have been attending for 1 year. Persons not meeting this minimum requirement may serve only as an assistant with another trained adult. The Safe Sanctuaries Board will consider exceptions to this rule

7. TRAINING AND SCREENING RECIPROCIDY

All volunteers and paid staff **are required** to attend policy instruction before working with children, youth, and vulnerable adults. In the case that this is not possible, the staff person or volunteer may only serve as an assistant with another trained adult and under the stipulation that they attend the next training session. All volunteers and staff are **required annually to review this policy**, to attend a policy instruction session, and to sign a new participation statement kept on file at the church.

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8. REPORTING OF INCIDENTS

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 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 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 Staff Parish Relations Team Chairperson or Staff Person may also be notified in order to be of assistance. Parents or legal guardians may be notified in appropriate circumstances.

9. STATEMENT TO THE MEDIA

All conversations with the media will be directed by the Senior Pastor of GSUMC