

SAFER SANCTUARIES POLICY FOR MINISTRY WITH CHILDREN, YOUTH, AND VULNERABLE ADULTS

Main Street United Methodist Church

ADOPTED SEPT 2025

Table of Contents

Introduction	2
Definitions/Scope	3
Volunteer/Staff Selection Policy	3
Training	4
Ministry Supervision Guidelines	5
Social Media and Electronic Communications	6
Reporting Policy	6
Inadvertent Failure to Follow Policy	8
Congregational Covenant and Adoption	8
Conclusion	9
Appendix A - Reporting Form	10
Appendix B - Volunteer Agreement and Liability Release	13
Appendix C - Volunteer Application	15

I. Introduction

Welcoming children, youth, and vulnerable adults to an environment intentionally designed to protect these individuals is a practice of Christian hospitality and an opportunity for vital ministry. As a Christian community of faith that aims to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world, we pledge to conduct the ministry of the Gospel in ways that assure the safety and spiritual growth of all children, youth, and vulnerable adults - as well as those who serve directly in ministry with such populations.

Children, youth, and other vulnerable adults are in many ways least able to protect themselves in our society, and as such are uniquely vulnerable to abuse and neglect. Acknowledging this, the United Methodist Church in general - and Main Street United Methodist Church in particular - is eager to do all it can to foster healthy and safe environments for the youth, children, and other vulnerable adults who participate in the life of the church.

We believe implementing a policy and adopting procedures to protect our children, youth, and other vulnerable adults recognizes their inherent worth as people made in the image of God, and helps us live into Christ's vision of reconciliation and justice.

Tragically, churches have not always been safe places for children, youth, and other vulnerable adults. Neglect, abuse, and exploitation occur in all varieties of churches; large and small, urban and rural. The problem cuts across all socioeconomic, cultural, racial, and demographic lines. God calls us to make our churches safe places, protecting children, youth, and other vulnerable people from abuse.

We believe that abuse prevention and ministry protection policies and procedures are essential for congregations, not only for the protection and safety of our children, youth, and other vulnerable persons, but also for our volunteers and staff working with them.

Jesus taught, "Whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me" (Mark 9:37 NRSV) and "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).

That said, we should not allow possible risks to undermine or stop our ministry. We must:

- Acknowledge the risks and develop a practical plan to address these issues;
- Take steps to prevent harm to our children, youth, and other vulnerable adults; and
- Continue to answer the Gospel's imperative to be in ministry with all

Safer Sanctuaries policies and implementation of practices that reflect those policies seek to fulfil this call for our church.

II. Definitions

For the purpose of this policy, we will define the following terms as such:

Child or Youth - Any person under the age of 18

Adult - Any person 18 years old or older

Vulnerable Adult - Any person 18 years or older who is in need of special care, support, or protection due to diminished physical, mental, or emotional capacities - or - at risk of abuse due to the power dynamics of the situation

Leader - Any adult - paid or volunteer - who has supervision or management responsibilities with children, youth, or vulnerable adults.

III. Scope

This policy shall apply to all activities sponsored by Main Street United Methodist Church, regardless of location, as well as any activities utilizing its facilities.

Outside groups utilizing the church's facilities shall be required to adhere to this policy or adopt and adhere to equivalent policies established by the state or local municipality. Where the two policies are in conflict or none exists, the policy in the best interest of the child, youth, or vulnerable adult shall be followed.

IV. Volunteer/Staff Selection Policies

All volunteer and paid staff who work with children, youth, and other vulnerable people at Main Street UMC **shall** be:

- At least 21 years old. Exceptions can be made in conversation with clergy and staff in regards to approved youth helpers.
- At least five years older than the oldest child/youth they will be supervising.
- A regular attendee at Main Street United Methodist Church for at least six months. Exceptions can be made in conversation with clergy and staff for special situations.

All volunteer and paid staff (including clergy) who work with children, youth, and other vulnerable adults at Main Street UMC **shall**:

- Complete and sign an application and the related waivers giving permission to church leadership to check references and background information.
- Provide the names and contact information of three personal references to clergy/staff.
- Undergo a criminal background check if they will have leadership responsibility for children/youth/other vulnerable adults. Individuals who have been convicted of physical or sexual abuse or neglect **shall not** work in any church-sponsored activity or program for children, youth, or other vulnerable adults.
 - All applicants must be interviewed for suitability for the work they desire to do. Interviews will be conducted by the staff/volunteer leader of the program in which the applicant will work. Church policy and guidelines **shall** be discussed during the interview.
 - Background checks shall be rescreened every three years.
- Sign a Covenant Agreement to document their understanding of the responsibilities of a volunteer with children, youth or vulnerable adults.

Any new or short term volunteer who works with children, youth, and other vulnerable adults at Main Street UMC **shall** at a minimum:

- Be under the supervision of a trained volunteer, paid staff, or clergy.
- Review the “Ministry Supervision Guidelines”, “Social Media and Electronic Communications”, and “Reporting Policy” sections of this document.

V. Training

Prior to engaging in ministry with children, youth, and vulnerable adults, Main Street UMC volunteers and paid staff, including clergy, **shall** undergo child protection safety training. Comprehensive training on identifying, reporting, and responding to instances of abuse and neglect in church settings shall be required for all clergy, paid staff, and volunteers (e.g., youth group leaders) who regularly supervise activities for children, youth, and other vulnerable adults. This training **shall** be offered at least annually.

Equivalent “youth protection” training from other sources may be acceptable, as long as the training source has been approved by the clergy or safety committee chair. Main Street UMC shall maintain a record of all training participants.

VI. Ministry Supervision Guidelines

Whenever supervising activities involving children and youth at Main Street UMC,

- At least two non-related adults (including at least one screened adult) **shall** always be present. A screened adult is someone who has a current background check, is trained, and has signed a covenant agreement in accordance with this policy.
- Children, youth, and other vulnerable people **shall** be checked into and out of a church-sponsored activity by their parent or legal guardian or people authorized by the parent/legal guardian.
- Participants **shall** have access to a telephone or cell phone when groups are at or away from the church facility.
- One-on-one interactions between minors and adults **shall** only occur with an open door and visible to all. The pastor, parent or guardian, or another screened adult **shall** be made aware of any such interactions.
- Activities with children, youth and other vulnerable adults **shall** be publicly accessible. Anyone has the right to visit and observe the children's/youth's/other vulnerable person's activity, classroom, or church sponsored program at any time, unannounced as long as the two-adult rule is being followed. Exceptions to this right may be issued at the discretion of church leadership.
- All classroom and office doors **shall** have a window or be visible from the hallway, or doors **shall** remain open while the room is occupied.
- Door windows **shall** be kept free from adornment.
- If the two-adult rule cannot be observed, a screened, designated roamer **shall** regularly check on groups with only one adult.
- For overnight events at the church and church-sponsored off-premise activities, two or more screened adults **shall** be present. This arrangement must include appropriate adult supervision for the participants in the activity.

Whenever Main Street UMC transports children, youth, or other vulnerable adults away from the church campus,

- No youth **shall** drive themselves to/from events.
- An adult **shall not** transport a non-related child/youth/other vulnerable adult alone.
- Drivers of church vehicles **shall** be approved and covered by the church's insurance company.
- Drivers **shall** go through the same screening process as all other paid/volunteer staff.

Whenever Main Street UMC hosts an activity involving children, youth, or other vulnerable adults from another church or community organization,

- Groups using the church facility **shall** follow Safer Sanctuaries Policy for Ministry with Children, Youth, and Vulnerable Adults at Main St UMC

VII. Social Media and Electronic Communications:

Electronic communications and social media can be useful tools in supporting ministries with children, youth, and other vulnerable adults. However, in such circumstances, the following standards **shall** be upheld:

- The volunteer or staff person **shall not** initiate a connection (friending, following, etc.) with a child, youth, or vulnerable adult through personal accounts on any social media platform.
- If a student initiates a connection, the child, youth, or vulnerable adult's parent or guardian as well as the appropriate staff **shall** be notified.
- If an adult leader receives a private text from a child, youth, or vulnerable adult that violates any part of this policy or could potentially trigger the need to file a report, the adult leader **shall** immediately end the conversation in the virtual space and offer opportunities to have the conversation in person and in compliance with the established guidelines for one-on-one conversations. The ministry supervisor and/or parent/guardian **shall** be made aware of the incident immediately.*
- Adult leaders **shall** only post photos on social network sites with prior written permission granted by a parent/guardian. When posted, photos of children and youth **shall not** be tagged with names or location indicators. All photos **shall** be appropriate and in keeping with the spirit of the ministry event.
- All in-person protection policies **shall** apply to online meeting platforms including, but not limited to, Zoom, Skype, and Messenger. (For example, two unrelated adults should be present in the virtual room just as they would be in a physical room.)
- An official church account **shall** be established and used for online activities, not a personal account.
- Communication about online meetings **shall** be shared with parents/guardians as well as with children, youth, and vulnerable adults.
- Adult leaders and participants **shall** use their real names as usernames when communicating for church activities.
- Attendance of online meetings **shall** be documented.
- All electronic communications **shall** be documented and retained.

**If an in-person meeting is not possible, the adult who has been contacted and appropriate staff will determine the most reasonable alternative in compliance with the earlier guidelines for one-on-one conversations.*

VIII. Reporting Procedures

In the state of Virginia anyone can report knowledge or observation of conditions that result in the harm of a child, youth, or vulnerable adult, but some individuals are mandated to report cases of abuse and neglect - as well as situations where a child/youth is an imminent threat to

themselves or others - to the proper authorities. There are consequences for not reporting including potential fines and criminal charges. In the state of Virginia, all clergy, religious leaders, childcare providers, licensed medical professionals, and educators are considered mandatory reporters. The United Methodist Book of Discipline also speaks to this in paragraph 341.5.

If a suspected incident of child abuse or neglect occurs or is revealed to a volunteer/paid staff person at a Main Street UMC-sponsored activity, the follow actions **shall** be taken in the following order:

Step 1. Ensure the immediate safety of the child, youth, or vulnerable adult that is the victim of abuse or neglect

Step 2. Alert appointed clergy/staff to the concern and remove the accused abuser from further ministry involvement until the proper authorities can investigate

Step 3. Report the incident to parents/guardians¹, Child Protective Services and law enforcement. Staff/Volunteer who initiated report documents exactly what was said and done up to this point.

Step 4. Clergy² reports the incident to denominational leadership (Living Waters District Superintendent), and a designee selected by the Board of Trustees reports the incident to the insurance company and appropriate legal representation.

Step 5. Document the steps taken by the church and all involved with the incident with as much detail as possible. See Appendix A.

Step 6. Trustees and Church Council designate a spokesperson to make any necessary public statements

Step 7. Clergy and Lay Leader prepare and present a brief and honest statement for the congregation

Step 8. Cooperate fully and to the best of your ability with investigations from law enforcement and/or other relevant agencies

1. In situations where parents/guardians are accused of abuse or neglect, they shall be informed after an official report has been made with CPS and/or Law Enforcement

2. In situations where the appointed clergyperson is named as the abuser in the suspected incident of abuse or neglect, a designee selected by the Church Council/Board of Trustees shall make a report to denominational leadership.

IX. Inadvertent Failures to Follow Policy

Main St UMC recognizes that in our active ministries to children, youth, and vulnerable adults, occasionally, a staff member or volunteer will find it necessary to care for an individual without the assistance of another volunteer or staff member. During training, we emphasize that those ministering to children/youth/vulnerable adults should endeavor to minimize such instances. Failure to follow this Policy on a routine, unnecessary or unjustified basis will result in a review with the appropriate supervisor who will determine necessary follow-up.

X. Congregational Covenant and Adoption

Main Street United Methodist Church's purpose for establishing this Safer Sanctuaries Policy for Child, Youth, and Vulnerable Adults and accompanying procedures is to demonstrate our total and unwavering commitment to the physical well-being, emotional safety, and spiritual growth of all children, youth, and vulnerable adults in our community.

We acknowledge that instances of abuse or neglect - substantiated or not - involving children, youth, or vulnerable adults have a profound impact on the victim, the accused, and the broader congregation. In such instances, we commit to a ministry of presence and pastoral care with all involved, and we commit to work towards restoring trust within our community.

We adopt this policy in accordance with the statement we as a congregation make at each baptism—that we will “nurture children and youth in the Christian faith and life and include them in our care.” With this policy, we renew our baptismal pledge to “live according to the example of Christ” and surround children, youth and other vulnerable people with a “community of love and forgiveness, that they may grow in their trust of God, and be thus confirmed and strengthened in the way that leads to life eternal.” (Baptismal Covenant II, United Methodist Book of Worship, p.96).

This policy supersedes any previous versions of Safe Sanctuaries policies used by Main Street UMC.

Through this policy and its accompanying procedures, we implement prudent operational procedures in all programs and events.

- a. Training: Main St UMC **shall** conduct training on this policy and its procedures to assure that adults involved in activities with children, youth, and vulnerable people are aware of these standards and will abide by them.
- b. Screening: All adults and minors above the age of fourteen who have direct involvement with activities covered by this policy and its procedures **shall** be screened in accordance with Virginia Annual Conference policy. All people who are subject to this policy **shall** be rescreened every three (3) years. Any person who was screened but, for whatever

reason, has been absent from the Main Street UMC community for more than one (1) year and thereafter returns, **shall** be rescreened.

- c. Supervision: All activities covered by this policy and its procedures **shall** be supervised by the appropriate number of screened adults.

Upon its adoption, a copy of this policy - as well as the Virginia Conference Policy for Conference-Sponsored Gatherings - shall be available in a publically-available digital format online at (www.mainstumc.org) and in a physical format located in the Main St UMC Administrative Office.

XI. Conclusion

In all our ministries with children, youth, and vulnerable adults, Main Street United Methodist Church is committed to demonstrating the love of Jesus Christ so that each of God's children here will be "surrounded by steadfast love, established in the faith, and confirmed and strengthened in the way that leads to life eternal." ("Baptismal Covenant 11," United Methodist Hymnal, p.44.)

This Child, Youth, and Other Vulnerable People Protection Policy is adopted by action of the Church Council of Main Street United Methodist Church this _____ day of _____, 2025.

_____ Appointed clergy and/or supply pastor(s)	_____ Date
_____ Chair, Staff Parish Relations Committee	_____ Date
_____ Chair, Church Council	_____ Date

Report of Suspected/Observed Incident of Abuse

Name of youth worker (staff or volunteer) observing or receiving disclosure of abuse:

Victim's Name: _____

Victim's Age/DOB: _____

Victim's Connection to Main St UMC: _____

Victim's Statement/Detailed Description of Observation:

Name of Person Accused: _____

Relationship of Accused to Victim: _____

Report to Clergy

Person Making Report: _____

Name of Clergy: _____

Date/Time/Location of Conversation: _____

Summary: _____

Report to Parent/Guardian

Person Making Report: _____

Name of Parent/Guardian: _____

Date/Time/Location of Conversation: _____

Summary: _____

Report to CPS/Family Services

Person Making Report: _____

Name of Social Worker: _____

Date/Time/Location of Conversation: _____

Summary: _____

Report to Law Enforcement

Person Making Report: _____

Name of LEO: _____

Date/Time/Location of Conversation: _____

Summary: _____

Other Disclosures

Please list all other individuals who have been made aware of the accusations and/or incident, when they were informed, and why

Name: _____

Day/Time of Disclosure: _____

Reason for Disclosure: _____

Name: _____

Day/Time of Disclosure: _____

Reason for Disclosure: _____

Name: _____

Day/Time of Disclosure: _____

Reason for Disclosure: _____

Signature of Incident Reporter

Date

Received By

Date

Volunteer Agreement and Release from Liability

Main Street United Methodist Church

202 N Main St, Suffolk, VA 23434

Name of Event

Date of Event

Volunteer Name (Please Print)

In signing this form, I understand and agree to the following terms and conditions related to my ministry volunteering with Main St United Methodist Church:

- I recognize that, as a volunteer, I represent the above organization to the public. I accept responsibility for this status and will conduct myself accordingly.
Please initial here: _____
- I agree to abide by the Safer Sanctuaries Policy for Ministry with Children, Youth, and Vulnerable Adults at Main St United Methodist Church. I understand that the limits of confidentiality, however, include that I must immediately report to the appropriate leadership any knowledge or involvement in regard to child, youth, or vulnerable adult abuse and the intentions to do harm to another person or to oneself. Please initial here:

- I am aware that as a volunteer, I expose myself to potential hazards which include but are not limited to: kitchen accidents, cuts, burns, back injury from lifting, car accidents, property damage or injury to others in car accidents, falls, etc. I am voluntarily participating in this service with the knowledge of the potential hazards involved and hereby agree to accept any and all risks of injury.
Please initial here: _____
- I agree that my assignees, heirs, distributes, guardians, and other legal representatives will not make a claim against, or sue for injury or damage resulting from the negligence or other acts, howsoever caused, by any employee, agent, or volunteer contractor of the organization as a result of my participation as a volunteer. I hereby release Main St UMC from all actions, claims, or demands that I, my assignees, heirs, guardians and legal representatives now have or may hereafter have for injury resulting from my participation as a volunteer.
Please initial here: _____
- If my volunteer service includes driving an automobile, I acknowledge that I have both a valid driver's license and automobile liability insurance policy as required by state law. I

agree to maintain my license and insurance in good standing for my tenure as a volunteer for the organization. I am knowledgeable of and agree to abide by local and state traffic laws. I agree not to drive while under the influence of alcohol and/or other intoxicating substances.

Please initial here: _____

- I agree to bring any problems or conflicts that are beyond the scope of my volunteer service or ability, to the immediate attention of the appropriate church staff leadership.

Please initial here: _____

- As a volunteer, I understand that my services can be discontinued at any time for any reason.

Please initial here: _____

Signature of Volunteer

Date

Signature of Parent/Guardian (If Under 18 years of age)

Date

APPENDIX C - Volunteer Application

Volunteer Application

Main Street United Methodist Church

202 N Main St, Suffolk, VA 23434

Thank you for your interest in volunteering at Main St UMC with our children, youth, and/or vulnerable adults. Please fill out the following application to the best of your ability, and we will get you plugged into the ministry as soon as possible!

Section I. Contact Information

First Name _____ Middle _____ Last _____

Preferred Name _____ Preferred Pronouns _____

Home Address _____

City/State/Zip _____

Preferred Phone _____ Email _____

Preferred Method of Contact (select one) Phone Call Text Message Email

Section II. Personal Information

Occupation _____ Employer _____

Current Work Responsibilities and Schedule _____

Previous Relevant Work Experience _____

Previous Relevant Volunteer Experience _____

Special Skills/Hobbies/Interests That May Come In Handy _____

Do you have your own form of transportation? _____ Do you have a driver's license? _____

Have you been through training for the Safer Sanctuaries Policy for Ministry with Children, Youth, and Vulnerable Adults at Main St UMC in the last three years?

Yes/No _____

If not, have you been through a comparable child protection / abuse prevention training in the last three years? Who conducted the training?

Section III. Why Do You Want To Volunteer?

Please provide a few sentences in response to each of the following

Why would you like to volunteer with children, youth, and/or vulnerable adults at Main St UMC?

What qualities do you have that you think will help you engage in ministry with children, youth, and/or vulnerable adults?

Have you ever been charged, convicted of, or pled guilty to a crime - either a misdemeanor or a felony - including but not limited to drug-related charges, child abuse or neglect, crimes of violence, theft, or motor-vehicle related offenses? If yes, please explain.

Section IV. References

Please provide contact information for three personal references that are not related by blood or marriage.

Reference 1

Name: _____

Mailing Address: _____

Phone Number: _____

Email Address: _____

Relationship to Applicant: _____

Length of Relationship with Applicant: _____

Reference 2

Name: _____

Mailing Address: _____

Phone Number: _____

Email Address: _____

Relationship to Applicant: _____

Length of Relationship with Applicant: _____

Reference 3

Name: _____

Mailing Address: _____

Phone Number: _____

Email Address: _____

Relationship to Applicant: _____

Length of Relationship with Applicant: _____

Section V. Social Media and Liability Release

It is both an immense privilege and sacred responsibility to create safe places for children, youth, and vulnerable adults to develop their faith at Main St UMC. By submitting this application, you agree to uphold the Safer Sanctuaries Policy for Ministry with Children, Youth, and Vulnerable Adults.

Initial Here: _____

By submitting this application, you consent to have your likeness shared through church communication channels - including, but not limited to, Facebook, Instagram, and the church newsletter.

Initial Here: _____

Although Main St UMC attempts to create as safe and nurturing an environment as possible, we know that accidents still happen. By submitting this application, you release Main St UMC, it's staff, and fellow volunteers of liability in the event of an accident resulting in bodily injury.

Initial Here: _____

Applicant Signature _____

Date _____

Received By: _____

Date _____