

## The Development and Guidelines for a Safe Sanctuary Policy

Why does your church need a Safe Sanctuary Policy? First of all, it has been mandated by the General Conference since 1996. Secondly, we need to protect our children, youth and vulnerable adults\* from abuse. Thirdly, we need to protect our churches, our staff and our volunteers from false accusations and possible lawsuits. Remember that trustees and others can be help personally liable.

The following is a definition of child abuse supplied by The Georgia Department of Family and Child Services. The same definitions apply to elder abuse.

“What is considered child abuse and neglect?

**Physical abuse** is injury to a child under age 18, by a parent or caretaker, which results in bruises, welts, fractures, burns, cuts or internal injuries.

**Neglect** is the failure of the parent or caretaker to see that the child is adequately supervised, fed, clothed, housed or provided medical care.

**Sexual abuse** occurs when a parent or other adult uses a child under age 18 for sexual stimulation.”

\*Vulnerable adults are adults who are mentally challenged and elderly adults or anyone over 18 years of age who may be vulnerable to physical, psychological, sexual or financial abuse.

Each church is different and the policy needs to reflect the differences, the following is a discussion of the needs for different parts of a policy along with sample sections. *The sample sections are shown in italics.* Each local church is welcome to use any or all parts of the italics in their policy.

Each church policy should have a title page that should include the name of the church, Safe Sanctuary Policy, and the dates that it has been approved by the appropriate committees. In most churches that will be the trustees and the church council or administration council. There should also be a date stating when it was submitted to the annual charge conference. The following is an example of the title page.

*(Church Name) United Methodist Church*

*(Church City), Georgia*

*Safe Sanctuary Policy*

*Approved by Trustees: (Date)*

*Approved by Church Council: (Date)*

*Submitted to Charge Conference: (Date)*

Next should be an introduction that states why the church has a policy. The following is a sample of an introduction.

*(Church Name) believes that the spiritual, emotional and physical well being of our children, youth and vulnerable adults is imperative. We must do all that we can to nurture and protect our children, youth and vulnerable adults. This policy is intended to provide a guide for that protection, as well as the protection of our adult workers and the church. This policy is enacted to insure that the parents, members, volunteers and staff of (Church Name) have a clear understanding of what the policies and procedures are regarding the safety of our children, youth and vulnerable adults. The leadership of (Church Name) requests the cooperation of the all in our church, as they must abide by the guidelines of this policy*

A statement of who should be covered by the policy should be included. Be sure to include any church supported pre-school, sports programs, scouts, etc. and any such programs that use your church facilities. The following is a sample.

***Policy Standards and General Christian Moral Standard***

*Staff and volunteers that work in any area of children and youth ministries or with vulnerable adults at (Church Name), including but not limited to (see list above), are required to adhere to these policies and standards as moral Christians.*

A statement of who should be charged with enforcing this policy and how to respond if the policy is not being enforced should be developed. The following is a sample.

***Supervision of Children and Youth Workers***

*The church staff and volunteers who supervise children and youth workers and workers with vulnerable adults are charged with enforcing this policy. Any violation of these policies or persistent failure to follow this policy can result in immediate dismissal, disciplinary action or reassignment to another area of work at the discretion of the Church Council (or Administrative Council) and/or Staff Parish Relations Committee. Anyone who suspects this policy is not being enforced should bring it to the attention of the person who is deemed "person in charge" of the specific program or event. This person must take immediate action on this violation. All reports must be brought before the Senior Pastor and/or their designee immediately\*.*

\* Each church may want to be specific, for example, within 24 hours.

The church needs to determine who will be responsible for the supervision of the policy. It is recommended that a committee or subcommittee be formed for that purpose. The following is a sample.

***Supervision of the Safe Sanctuaries Policy***

*The Senior Pastor will appoint the person or committee (staff or volunteer) with the responsibility of the oversight of the Safe Sanctuary Policy. These policies govern all activities held by the church that involve children and youth under the age of 18, any adult with a mental age under 18 or any vulnerable adult.*

*These policies must be reviewed annually and re-approved by the Church Council (or Administrative Council) and be presented at charge conference. These policies may be altered at any time with the approval of the Church Council (or Administrative Council) and the Trustees.*

The parameters for the workers that will be covered by the policy must be defined. Depending on the scope of your ministry, the size of the church and the availability of workers, the church may want to have one classification for all workers or may have different tiers. The policy may want to set the minimum age at 18 years for all, depending on the availability of volunteers. If only one classification is used, all references to **primary** workers should apply to all workers. If the age is lowered to something less than 18 years, keep in mind that a background check cannot be done on anyone under 18 years. Youth age workers are covered in a later section. The following is a sample for a two tier approach followed by a one tier approach.

#### ***Classification of Workers (two tiers)***

*(Church Name) uses the following classifications of its workers:*

- 1. **Primary Workers:** All paid staff and volunteers in roles with a greater responsibility or risk shall be classified as primary workers and will be required to meet “primary worker” responsibilities. Primary workers have the primary responsibility for, interaction with and greater access to youth, children and vulnerable adults. A primary worker must be a minimum of 21 years of age. Examples are Sunday school teachers and youth counselors.*
- 2. **Secondary Workers:** Secondary workers are volunteers who have occasional contact with children, youth and vulnerable adults. These persons work with supervision of a primary worker. A secondary worker must be a minimum of 18 years of age. Examples are parents helping with a class or program such as VBS or helpers in Sunday School.*

*Or*

#### ***Classification of Workers (one tier)***

*(Church Name) classifies its workers as follows:*

*Our workers are all paid staff and volunteers in roles with a responsibility for, interaction with and access to youth, children and vulnerable adults. A worker must be a minimum of 21 years of age.*

Make a provision for youth working with children and establish an age difference for all workers. This is very important for youth workers and for youth working with children. Next establish a six month rule. While this may seem harsh when there is a willing volunteer, predators can move fast to gain trust. The following is a sample.

#### ***Guidelines for Volunteers***

*All volunteer workers must be at least 18 years of age. Youth under the age of 18 may assist with the **Children’s Ministries**, under the leadership of a **primary** worker, but adherence to the Two Worker Rule is **mandatory**.*

*All volunteer workers must be at least five years older than the children or youth with whom they will be working.*

*Any person wishing to work with the youth, children or vulnerable adults must have been a member of the church or have been a steady visitor for a minimum of six months before being allowed to volunteer. This policy can be waived only by the Senior Pastor, on a case by case basis, when needed.*

Background checks should be done on all volunteers 18 years of age and over. They cannot be done on those under 18. It is recommended that a national background check be done verses a Georgia check. If the worker has had a problem in another state and not in Georgia, it will not be caught. Many local law enforcement agencies will do this for your church for little or no cost. There are commercial services that will also do this. The following is a sample of a policy.

### ***Background Checks***

*Any **primary** worker working with the youth, children or vulnerable adults of (Church Name) must undergo a national criminal background check. The report must show no serious\* offenses or they will not be allowed to become a worker. Workers will not be allowed to chaperone an event off of church grounds until the background check has been completed and the report has been cleared by the Senior Pastor or his/her designee. A **primary** worker awaiting results may participate with on site activities as long as they are supervised by another **primary** worker. A new background check should be done at least every five years.*

\*Each church will need to define serious. For instance, do you want someone who has numerous traffic violations transporting children or youth?

Training **ALL** workers, including staff, must be done. It is recommended that all workers have First Aid and CPR training. There should be at least two people CPR and First Aid certified at all children's and youth activities. CPR certification is good for two years. Any worker supervising off site activities must be trained. All workers must be trained on Safe Sanctuary policies. Training sessions should be held annually and more often depending on the needs of the church. All workers need to take a refresher course every two years. The following is a sample.

### ***First Aid and CPR Training***

*Since the safety of our children and youth is a top priority, every **primary** worker shall be trained in both First Aid and CPR. All paid nursery workers should be certified in infant CPR. The church will hold training classes at least once a year and it is the worker's responsibility to sign up for the class.*

### ***Annual Orientation***

*All new **primary** workers must attend a Safe Sanctuary orientation. The church will provide an orientation and refresher course that will provide information on child, youth and elder abuse and explain any changes made to the Safe Sanctuary Policy. This may or may not be held in conjunction with First Aid and CPR training. All **primary** workers must take a refresher course every two years.*

Some rules are needed to protect our children, youth and vulnerable adults. These rules also protect our workers from false accusations. The two worker rule is **very, very** important. The size of the church or the availability of workers may make this hard to achieve. If that is the case, try to have two workers but mandate the floater and open door. The following is a sample.

#### ***Two Worker Rule***

*There must be both one **primary** worker and one secondary worker or two **primary** workers in the room when there is a child, youth or vulnerable adult present. This rule is for the protection of the students as well as the adults.*

#### ***Floater***

*This rule allows for only one **primary** worker to be in a classroom when you have another **primary** worker floating the hall regularly. When using this rule, the classroom door must remain open at all times. This should only be done if two workers are not available.*

#### ***Classroom Windows***

*All classrooms will have at least one window in the door. The window must **not** be covered at any time with decorations, etc.*

#### ***Open Door Counseling***

*Any one-on-one counseling session with a child or youth will be done with the door open. If at all possible, it should be done when another adult is nearby but not necessarily within hearing distance.*

Rules should be established for offsite transportation and sleeping arrangements. If a church van or volunteer vehicles are used to pick up children, youth or vulnerable adults, to bring to onsite activities, a proper transportation policy should be in effect that uses the two worker rule. That can be a separate policy or can be incorporated into this policy. The type of written permission for trips could be included in this section instead of the next section. The following is a sample.

#### ***Transportation***

*Transportation to and from activities held at the church is not the church's responsibility.*

*Church approved volunteers may provide transportation to and from activities held away from the church. If there is only one vehicle, there must be two adults present. When there is an offsite trip, there must be at least one adult worker of each gender represented. Youth will not be allowed to drive other youth or children or themselves. Church approved volunteers must have a valid driver's license and an insurance card on file in the Church office.*

#### ***Sleeping Arrangements***

*On church sponsored overnight trips, where motel type rooms are used, all youth and children should be assigned their own same sex rooms and adults will be assigned their own same sex rooms. The adult rooms should be in between the youth/children rooms if at all possible. The adults should check on the youth/children at random times throughout the night.*

The next section deals with our need to have proper communication with the parents of our children and youth. If the church has a web site and children and/or youth web sites, the Safe Sanctuary Policy should be posted on these web sites. Information about the availability of the web sites should be included in the communication section below. The following is a sample.

### ***Parent and Family Education and Communication***

*The approval of this policy will be communicated to the church at large with special emphasis on communicating to all parents of our children and youth. Copies of the policy will be available for all parents and other interested parties. A copy of the policy will be given to all new members. Any revisions to the policy must be communicated to the congregation as soon as possible.*

*From time to time educational events will be made available to parents and other interested parties. These events will provide information on the Safe Sanctuary Policy, child abuse and any other information that will enhance parenting skills.*

*Parents will be provided with advance notice of all regular scheduled and special youth and children's activities. Written permission will be required for participation in activities that are not on church grounds.*

In this age of the internet, we need to protect our children and youth. While this may seem strong, there are many people looking in the internet, for any information they can find, in order to make improper contact with a child or youth. The following is a sample policy.

### ***Websites, Photos and E-mail***

*E-mail communication is becoming more and more important. E-mail from adults sent to youth and children should be limited to information related to youth and children ministries. It should not be used to pass along jokes, etc. E-mail addresses of youth and children should be protected and not given out. Any photos on web sites, posted in class rooms or posted on bulletin boards should not identify individuals. If allergy signs are posted, they should not show the names. Written permission must be received from parents before any photo of children or youth is posted on a church sponsored web site, in classrooms or on bulletin boards.*

The next section addresses how and when to report abuse or suspected abuse. It is very important to have a plan in place for proper reporting and to protect the victim and the church. The following is a sample. The law requires that ALL adults must report abuse.

### ***Reporting Abuse***

*(Church Name) regards any form of abuse and evidence thereof as unacceptable and has a strict policy regarding the reporting of such abuse. This is a serious criminal allegation and will be taken seriously. If a volunteer becomes aware of an abuse allegation, they must report it to a (Church Name) staff member **IMMEDIATELY**\*. If there is not a staff member on the grounds, then the Senior Pastor should be contacted at home or their designee must be contacted. Please **do not** hesitate to contact a staff member if you feel there is abuse occurring. We want nothing but the best for our children, youth and vulnerable adults. For **ALL** allegations, a report **MUST** be filled out and turned into the Senior Pastor within twenty four*

hours (see attached). If any further reporting is needed, the Senior Pastor and/or their designee will handle the future reporting, including a report to the District Superintendent and law enforcement. Should the press or TV become involved, only an approved church spokesperson should respond. It is better not to make any response. Do not try to interview the victim. Leave that process to the proper professional law enforcement official, who is better qualified.

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\* Each church may want to be specific, for example, within 24 hours.

### ***Vulnerable Adults***

*While much of this policy addresses the need to protect our children and youth, (Church Name) recognizes that abuse of impaired and older adults is a major concern. Many older adults are also subject to financial abuse. We must be vigilant for signs of abuse in our adult membership and report any suspected abuse, following the process outlined above. The local Department of Family and Child Services has a division with responsibility for supervising elder care.*

## Report of Suspected Incident of Abuse

Name of worker observing/receiving disclosure of abuse: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_ Phone #: \_\_\_\_\_

Victim's Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Victim's Age/Date of Birth: \_\_\_\_\_

Date/Place of witnessed activity or initial conversation with victim: \_\_\_\_\_

Victim's Statement: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Name of person accused of abuse: \_\_\_\_\_

Relationship of accused to victim: \_\_\_\_\_

Name of Pastor/Ministry Supervisor to whom you reported: \_\_\_\_\_

Date/time: \_\_\_\_\_

Summary: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_



The following should be completed by the Pastor/ Ministry Supervisor in charge:

Name of parent/guardian to who reported: \_\_\_\_\_

Date/Time: \_\_\_\_\_

Summary: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

-Call to Department of Family and Children Services

Spoke with: \_\_\_\_\_

Date/Time: \_\_\_\_\_

Summary: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

-Call to Local Law Enforcement

Spoke with: \_\_\_\_\_

Date/Time: \_\_\_\_\_

Summary: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Other Contacts/Action Taken

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_