

SAFE SANCTUARY POLICY
Updated June 2016
San Ramon Valley UMC – Alamo, CA

INTRODUCTION

The General Conference of the United Methodist Church adopted a resolution in April 1996 aimed at reducing the risk of child abuse in the church. The adopted resolution calls for all churches to welcome the children and also to make our churches safe places for children and youth to grow and learn. It is our responsibility to be proactive in our recruiting and training to find people with a gift for caring for children and youth and also to protect those volunteers from false accusations. It is also our responsibility to oversee all programs involving children and youth to make sure there is a safe environment and to have a plan of response in place should an accusation arise. The General Conference resolution affirmed that every local church shall have a policy in place for protecting children.

PURPOSE

San Ramon Valley United Methodist Church's (SRVUMC) purpose for establishing this Safe Sanctuary Policy and accompanying procedures is to demonstrate our absolute and unwavering commitment to the physical safety and spiritual growth of all of our children (preschool and elementary school) and youth (middle school and high school).

STATEMENT OF COVENANT

As a Christian community of faith committed to ministry to and with children and youth, we pledge to conduct all our activities and ministries in such a way that assure the safety and spiritual growth of all children and youth entrusted to us. We will follow reasonable safety measures in the selection and recruitment of workers and we will be responsible in overseeing our programs and events and in training our staff, so that they are able and equipped to minister to children in Jesus' name. We will report and respond to all suspected incidents of abuse as is required by state law and our moral conscience and we will be prepared to minister to the families of both the abused and the perpetrator.

Theological Reflection

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 and youth 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)

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PROCEDURES AND RULES FOR WORKING WITH CHILDREN AND YOUTH

This Policy applies to all clergy and lay staff members (collectively “staff”) and volunteers who work with children and youth who participate in any activities sponsored or conducted by SRVUMC (whether on SRVUMC property or on offsite outings), or by any organizations or individuals which occur on property under the control of SRVUMC, or while events are being sponsored by SRVUMC. The Director of Children’s Ministry will be the Safe Sanctuary Policy coordinator. This Policy does not apply to the United Methodist Preschool which will have its own child protection policy.

We adopt the following standards for our ministries with children and youth, answering this question as we proceed: “Are we being prudent and reasonable?”

1. Screening and Hiring Practices

- a. Staff and volunteers working with children and youth will complete a written application form listing standard contact information prior to engaging in such work.
- b. Staff will also fill out a Personal Reference Form with three unrelated references and will be told that the references will be contacted.
- c. Staff and volunteers will be informed that a Driver’s License check will be done if they will be transporting children or youth.
- d. All volunteers will complete the Six Month New Volunteer Apprenticeship Rule, where they work with an experienced staff or volunteer for six months.
- e. Staff and volunteers will agree to disclose involvement in any social media sites to assure appropriate use and will agree to follow the Cyber Safety Rules in Section 5 of this Policy.
- f. Prior to engaging in work with children or youth, staff and volunteers will complete a request for Criminal Background Check & Child Abuse History Clearance, which will need to be renewed every three years. They will be informed that local, state and national Megan’s Law websites will be checked.

2. Supervision

- a. **Two Adult Rule:** Every effort will be made to have two adults (preferably unrelated) present during each church activity or event involving children or

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youth. If it is not possible to have two unrelated adults present, another adult will be in the close vicinity as a roving monitor to make random appearances.

- b. **Restroom Policies:** For children preschool through 1st grade, an adult will accompany a child to the restroom. The adult will wait outside the restroom. The door will be open if it is a multi-stall restroom so that child can be heard, but not seen, if help is needed. If there is only one adult working with the children, the roving monitor will wait outside the restroom for the child. For 2nd-5th grade, the buddy system (the child and another classmate) shall be used when children leave the activity area and go to the restroom.
- c. **Five-Years-Older Rule:** Youth may be considered as one of the two adults in the room provided they are 5 years older than the oldest child in the group. No person shall supervise youth unless he or she is at least 5 years older than the oldest youth.
- d. **Doors and Windows:** The doors of all rooms where children or youth activities or events are conducted will have a window or visibility from a hallway or will remain open while occupied.
- e. **Individual Counseling:** Individual counseling of a child or youth shall occur with the door open, unless there is a window on the door and other adults are in the area. If at all possible, another adult should have knowledge of the location of the counseling session and who the participants are. Children and youth should be told they are free to discuss any aspects of the counseling process with a parent or other adult, especially if they are uncomfortable about anything that occurs in counseling.
- f. **Vehicles:** Adult drivers of children or youth on trips or for activities should have at least two youth or another unrelated adult in the vehicle.
- g. **Overnight Offsite Outings:** For overnight stays in a multi-bed facility (for example, a bunkroom), two same-gender unrelated adults may sleep in the room with the children or youth. For hotel stays during youth outings, adults should sleep in separate rooms from the youth. Youth doorways should be continually monitored from the hallway by adults.
- h. **First Aid/CPR Training:** All staff members working with children or youth need to be trained in First Aid and have CPR Training. It is preferred that more than one volunteer also be trained so that back-ups are always available during any activity.

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- i. **Annual Orientation:** Training of staff and volunteers on this Safe Sanctuary Policy shall be conducted at least once a year to train and update them to recognize the signs of abuse, as well as how to report abuse.

- j. **Advance Notice to Parents:** All activities or events should be planned well enough in advance so that parents can be given appropriate notice of the activity or event.
- k. **Required Written Parental Permission:** Registration materials for activities in which children are outside direct supervision of their parents/guardians shall require signed written permission forms that include pertinent health information in order to participate, as well as the supervision provided.
- l. **Participation Covenant for All Participants and Leaders:** If participants are old enough to understand, they shall sign a covenant of participation listing rules for all trips, overnights, etc. If not, a parent or guardian will sign for them.
- m. **Parent and Family Education:** – all parents and relevant family members will be offered training in this Safe Sanctuary Program at least once a year.
- n. **Appropriate Equipment:** All equipment will be inspected for safety purposes at least annually by a representative from the Board of Trustees.
- o. **Gifts:** No staff member or volunteer shall give gifts to individual children or youth without the knowledge of the parent(s) or senior pastor. Because gift giving can be a form of buying loyalty or silence, gift giving should be done on a group basis, or for special occasions only. Gifts should not be elaborate but modest and appropriate to the occasion.

3. Reporting

- a. LISTEN INTENTLY TO OUR CHILDREN AND YOUTH AND REPORT ANY POTENTIAL INCIDENT OF ABUSE.
- b. The appropriate staff member should notify the parents of the abuse victim and take any necessary steps to assure victim's safety. **The child's safety is the first concern.**
- c. The person receiving information of abuse should report the incident immediately to the senior pastor or other appropriate staff member who will immediately call California Emergency Response Child Abuse Reporting, Contra Costa County, at 925-646-1680 or 1-877-881-1116. **This is required by**

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California law. (Note: The church should not conduct an investigation. This should be done by professionals who are familiar with these cases.)

- d. The person reporting the abuse should provide written documentation on the designated form.
- e. If the abuse happened on church property by a church volunteer or staff member, they shall immediately be removed from contact with children and youth until the incident report has been resolved. Treat the accused with dignity
- f. and support, but immediately remove him or her from further involvement with children and youth. If circumstances dictate, the accused should temporarily be relieved of further duties and, if the accused is staff, arrangements should be made to either maintain or suspend his or her income until the allegations are cleared or substantiated.
- g. To the extent possible, the above action should be handled in a discreet manner.
- h. After reporting the abuse to the proper authorities, the senior pastor shall notify the District Superintendent, the church's legal counsel and the church's insurance agent. If the allegation is against the senior pastor, the Chair of Staff Parish Relations Committee will contact District Superintendent, legal counsel and the insurance agent immediately.
- i. All records relating to the matter will be maintained in confidential files.

4. Responding

- a. A quick, compassionate and unified response to an alleged incident of child abuse should be initiated and documented.
- b. Prepare a brief and honest statement that can be made to the congregation. Do not give unnecessary details, blame, interfere with victim's privacy or violate any confidentiality. There is a difference between confidentiality and secrecy. Make sure the statement is cleared with the District Superintendent and the church's legal counsel.
- c. The senior pastor shall be the sole spokesperson for SRVUMC and the District Superintendent will be the sole spokesperson for the District insofar as media inquiries, if any, are concerned. The senior pastor should consult with the District Superintendent to review any statements before they are shared with the media.
- d. Be prepared to cooperate fully with the investigation.

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- e. When the investigation is complete, send another letter to the congregation explaining the results of the investigation and steps taken.
- f. Pastoral support will be available to all persons involved in the incident as indicated.

5. Cyber-Safety

This section is intended to help protect our children and youth as they navigate in their world of technology. Cyber safety is a big concern of adults in helping parents to protect their child.

The internet and portable devices allow people to stay in contact with each other more easily than at any other time in the history of civilization. Some incredible ministry can take place using modern technology, but as with all forms of ministry there are some inherent risks involved with the use of electronic communications. However, following basic *Safe Sanctuaries* procedures can help to minimize those risks. There is no such thing as privacy in cyberspace. Consider anything and everything on the internet as public information.

- a. Parental permission is required, in writing or by email for:
 1. Posting photos or videos of their children or youth on any church websites
 2. The sharing of any full name or contact information.
 3. Emailing, Instant Messaging (IM'ing), calling, texting, or sending data to a child or youth via social media such as Facebook, Snapchat, etc., by computer, PDA, or cell phone (keep in mind "free" minutes and data plans vary tremendously even with the same carrier.)
- b. Never post easily identifiable information online:
 1. Use "Bcc" options in sending mass e-mails.
 2. Be cautious when transmitting easily identifiable information like event dates, times, locations, or participants.
 3. Limit what is communicated in electronic prayer requests. When placing a child or youth on an electronic prayer list, consider using only first names. If someone must know the last name or the mailing address of the individual, have her or him call the church office or a designated contact person.

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c. Individual communication with children and youth should follow these guidelines:

1. Conduct all communications in a professional manner.
2. Save all communications you have with children and youths.
3. Any topic involving harm to oneself or others is addressed in an e-mail/text or other electronic communication, contact a parent/guardian (if appropriate) or another trusted adult. If threat is imminent, call 911.
4. If abuse is divulged electronically, follow standard reporting procedures.

d. Safety Measures for sharing photos electronically:

1. When posting photos never use last names
2. Check photos for vulnerable/compromising situations and to make sure they uphold your mission. Check to make sure nametags are not distinguishable.

CONCLUSION

In all our ministries with children and youth, this congregation is committed to demonstrating the love of Jesus Christ so that each child will be "... surrounded by steadfast love... established in faith, and confirmed and strengthened in the way that leads to Life eternal" ("Baptismal Covenant II," *United Methodist Hymnal*, p.44).