

SAFE SANCTUARIES POLICY AND PROCEDURES
FOR THE PROTECTION OF CHILDREN, YOUTH, AND VULNERABLE ADULTS
AT MANCHACA UNITED METHODIST CHURCH
(Church Council adoption: 03/26/2015)

Revised November 15, 2018

Opening Statement

Manchaca United Methodist Church is a spiritual community which takes seriously its responsibility to provide a safe and nurturing environment for children and youth who participate in our ministries. All church workers who assist in these ministries are living out the vows we take in baptism to nurture our children and youth in the Christian faith. Every church worker plays a role in fostering the spiritual development of individuals and families in our church community.

We have become more aware as a society of the disturbing and traumatic issue of physical and sexual abuse of children. The following statements reflect the commitment of Manchaca United Methodist Church to provide a safe environment for all children, youth, and vulnerable adults who participate in church-sponsored ministries.

We know the policies stated in this document are much higher than the typical standard of care, but we aspire to make every effort to provide a safe community, this church requires all volunteers and staff to uphold these policies. In doing so, church workers will be asked to provide personal information, review the church policy, attend Safe Sanctuaries training, and understand that they will be under the supervision of their respective leaders.

As a licensed and accredited facility, the Child Development Center, a vital ministry of MUMC, may be required to develop their own policies and procedures in accordance with the requirements of the Texas Department of Protective and Regulatory Services.

Definitions

Adults	Persons 18 years or older who are no longer in high school
Child abuse	In very general terms it includes causing any mental, emotional, physical, and/or sexual injury to a minor, or failing to take reasonable actions to prevent such injury (see Texas Family Code Appendix I, 261.001)
Church workers	Staff, regular volunteers, and/or occasional volunteers
Facility	Includes MUMC buildings, grounds, equipment, furnishings, and materials
Field trips	Activities conducted away from the facility
Minor (child/youth)	Any person under the age of 18. In our ministries, children are fifth grade and younger, youth are students in sixth through twelfth grade. Those who are 18 and still in high school are considered youth and may participate in youth activities through the summer following graduation.
MUMC	Manchaca United Methodist Church
Occasional volunteer	Person who is called into service on a limited basis, for a specific or occasional event (example--visiting speaker, driver, meal server).

	Occasional volunteers are not permitted to work in one-on-one situations with children/youth.
Physical discipline	The use of force as a means of corrective action in order to change a perceived inappropriate behavior.
PPR	Pastor-Parish Relations team members make up the administrative unit in the local church where staff and congregational interests are integrated to focus on the mission of the church. They are full members and a sub-group of the Church Council.
Regular Volunteer	Person appointed to work with children/youth in a non-paid capacity in a regularly recurring role (example –Sunday School teacher) and/or in one-on-one situations (example- faith friend for confirmation).
Safety Policy Administrator	Identified staff, lay person, or committee/task force charged with the maintenance, implementation, and enforcement of this safety policy. The church council is responsible for reviewing and approving the Safe Sanctuary policy yearly. Ministry staff are responsible for its implementation and enforcement in their areas of ministries. The Director of Christian Education will maintain a list of who is “Safety Certified” by the Rio Texas Conference.
Senior Pastor	Provides managerial or leadership oversight to the staff team
Staff Supervision	All persons engaged in ministry at MUMC in a paid capacity. Adult care for a group of children/youth. This includes awareness of and responsibility for the ongoing activity of each child/youth.
UMYF	United Methodist Youth Fellowship (Youth Group)
Vulnerable Adult	Adults who are vulnerable to abuse due to age, illness, developmental or physical disability. All church staff and volunteers are vulnerable to allegations of abuse and are protected when Safe Sanctuary guidelines are followed.
Verbal abuse	To treat others in a rough or cruel way by means of spoken words.

Application of the Policy

The policy applies to all children's and youth ministries, activities, gatherings, meetings, trips, sleeping situations, campouts, and outings conducted by MUMC through its members, volunteers, and/or staff. This policy applies to MUMC and its members, volunteers, and/or staff. This policy includes but is not limited to Sunday School, UMYF, children and youth choirs, nursery, child care, and MUMC Conference and District sponsored events and camps.

Selection and Screening of Workers with Children and Youth

For purposes of this policy, persons working with children, youth, and/or vulnerable adults include not only such obvious people as youth ministers and Sunday School teachers but other adults who may have contact with or temporary supervision of children/youth (drivers, kitchen workers, etc.). No person with a known record of child

abuse, neglect or violence of any kind shall be engaged in ministry to children, youth, or vulnerable adult as either a staff member or a volunteer, regular or occasional. All workers with children/youth are expected to adhere to Christian principles, providing a positive role model for our children/youth.

There is to be at least a five (5) year age difference between the primary on-site adult supervisor and the children/youth with whom they work. Consistent with MUMC's personnel policy, all **paid workers** shall fill out an application or submit a resume that contains the following information:

- A. Name
- B. Address (current and previous)
- C. Phone numbers (home and work)
- D. Social security number
- E. Driver's license number
- F. Employment history for the past 5 years
- G. Volunteer work during the past 5 years
- H. Experiences and skills specifically related to the position
- I. Church membership
- J. References
- K. Consent to verify all information provided and to contact references
- L. Waiver of any right to confidentiality and of any right to pursue damages against the church or person providing information caused by reference's response
- M. Consent to a confidential criminal background check, and complete training through the Rio Texas Conference. MUMC will require such a check on persons applying for a position as a staff or regular volunteer worker with children/youth. Background checks will be run through Safe Gatherings. Background checks must be repeated on all staff who work directly with children and youth and regular volunteers every 2 years. Church workers who are supervising children/youth overnight, or who are traveling with children on a mission trip, camp or retreat must have a background check within the last year.
- N. A statement concerning criminal arrest or conviction
- O. Certification that the information provided is true and correct. Failure to provide true and correct information may be grounds for dismissal.

Applicants will preferably be a member of a United Methodist congregation or a member of another denomination. The pastor or a designated representative shall contact all references and must document each reference call. This documentation and the application shall be retained in a secure location (in the business administrator's office) for seven years. Any new supervisor will be required to review the documentation of the workers in his or her area.

All regular volunteers with children/youth shall fill out an application and criminal background check and complete the training necessary to become Safety Certified through the Rio Texas Conference every 2 years.

While **occasional volunteers** are not required to complete a questionnaire, they are expected to have non-criminal backgrounds and to adhere to the same standards of Christian behavior, as are staff and regular volunteers.

[Note: Staff employing paid contract workers will establish with the service company that these workers have met comparable guidelines to the ones listed here.]

Supervision and Monitoring of Workers with Children & Youth

BASIC PROCEDURES

Two-Adult Rule: Two non-related adults must be present during any church-sponsored program, event or ministry involving children or youth. This protects children and youth, but it is also the primary rule that protects adults from false accusations. When necessary, an adult “roamer” may be used to move in and out of separate rooms in which an event is being held where only one other staff or volunteer is present. When a husband and wife team co-teach a class, it is necessary to have a third adult present, or a “roaming” adult who is checking in on a regular basis.

Rule of Three: Church workers must avoid situations where they are one-on-one with children or youth. Whenever an adult must escort a child from one location to another, 3 people should go together. For example, if an adult has to take a child to the bathroom that is not in the classroom or go get a band aid, etc, the adult can take the child plus one other child, so that the adult does not end up in a one-on-one situation.

Open Door Counseling: In order to protect children, youth, and church workers, adults shall not be alone with a child or youth. Counseling sessions or one-on-one interactions must take place in a room with an open door or window, or in an open space where all parties can be easily seen by other adults in the vicinity. This applies to volunteers, staff and clergy.

Windows in Classroom Doors: All rooms used by children and youth shall have a window in the door or the door shall remain open.

Five-Years-Older Rule: Church workers in a supervisory role (staff and volunteers) must be at least 5 years older than the participants with whom they work.

No Workers Under the Age of Eighteen: Church workers in a supervisory role (staff and volunteers) must be at least 18 years old and out of high school. Volunteers under the age of 18 can serve as assistants in ministry with younger children, but may not be considered part of the adult/child ratio and must be supervised at all times by at least two safety-certified adults.

Six-Month Rule: No one should work with children or youth until they have been actively involved with MUMC for at least six months. Occasionally volunteers from other churches or teachers from the MUMC Child Development Center may work with children and youth at our facility. They must provide documentation (reference letter) that they are in good standing and have been actively involved with their congregation for at least six (6) months. Background checks and all other MUMC policies must be upheld.

Observation: The clergy, staff, and parents of children/youth in our ministry have the right to visit and observe events, classrooms or church-sponsored programs at any time, unannounced.

Discipline: All clergy, staff and volunteers will work to protect the dignity of children and youth. Workers will be trained in positive discipline strategies. **Physical discipline and verbal abuse will not be tolerated at any time.** Nursery and Sunday school handbooks need to have written disciplinary procedures in keeping with this policy.

Communication with Parents: Parents of children and youth should be given advance notice with information about what activities their children will be participating in while at church-sponsored events, especially if the activity has an inherent level of danger or includes content that parents may not want their children exposed to (i.e. a PG-13 movie). Parents have the right to determine whether the content and substance of an event are suitable for their child's participation.

Age-Level Participation: Children and youth may only participate in events that are consistent with their age group. For example, youth who have completed elementary school may no longer participate in events for elementary school children. Young adults who have graduated high school may no longer participate in youth events or Sunday school

classes. During summer months, rising 6th graders may still choose to participate in elementary activities; rising 9th graders may still participate in middle school activities; and graduating seniors may still participate in youth activities. Exceptions may be made if both the staff person in charge and the parent agree that a child's participation will be safe and appropriate for all parties (for example, some special needs children may participate in events meant for a younger age if their cognitive/emotional age is younger than their chronological age).

Adequate Supervision:

There must be a minimum of two Safety Certified leaders at all events with a minimum of one adult for every 8 participants. The following minimum ratios must be kept in all ministries:

- Children ages 0-1: 1:2
- Children ages 2-5: 1:5
- Children ages 6-11: 1:8
- Youth ages 12-17: 1:8

Note: Children with special needs often require more supervision and one-on-one care than is allowed by these ratios. When working with children or youth with special needs, care needs to be taken to ensure the safety of all participants. In addition, children who are misbehaving and creating an unsafe situation (for example, running away from the group) may require additional workers, or a parent to assist.

Registration/Check-in and Out Procedures:

Each child who participates in Sunday school on a regular basis should have a Sunday School Registration Form on file that includes pertinent information about the child (allergies/medical conditions/disabilities), parent's names and contact information, where the parents will be during Sunday school, emergency contacts, and who is allowed to pick up a child. These forms will be filled out at the beginning of each school year and are effective until the end of summer the following year. Originals will be kept in the office of the Director of Christian Education. Copies will be kept in the folders in the Sunday school classrooms.

All other events or classes for children require separate registration or sign-ups that include the same types of information (allergies/medical conditions/disabilities/parent's information/emergency information/who can pick up the child).

Special care must be taken to ensure that proper check-in and out procedures are established for all events that include children. If the person coming to pick up a child is not known by the church workers, they must ask for identification and verify that the person is on the approved pick-up list.

Youth must have a current Youth Medical Release and Permission Form on file. A new form must be filled out at the beginning of each school year and is effective through the summer of the following year. This form covers all on-site activities such as Sunday school, youth group and bible studies. All off-site events require their own permission slips.

Bullying and Sexual Harassment: Bullying is when one person hurts or threatens someone in their peer group. Physical bullying may include shoving, pushing and hitting. Words and non-verbal behavior can also be used to hurt someone by spreading rumors, hurtful teasing, taking part in gossip, threatening someone with looks, ignoring or excluding people from activities, etc. Sexual harassment can include making sexual advances, telling racy jokes or making obscene remarks. In order to establish Safe Sanctuaries for all participants, these types of behavior will not be tolerated in any form.

Injury and Incident Forms: If a child, youth, or adult staff or volunteer suffers an injury requiring first aid or medical attention, a church worker must fill out an Injury and Incident Form and notify a church staff member or clergy (see Appendix A).

We deem this policy to be in effect from the start of a church-sponsored event until its end. The church's responsibility starts when a child or youth presents himself or herself to an adult worker at the event, and it ends when youth are dismissed at the end of the event. The supervisor will make every effort to ensure that all youth have left the premises before leaving. Church workers should avoid being one-on-one situations with children or youth, even during the pick-up period. When possible two adults should stay until all children/youth are gone. If that is not possible, the adult and child/youth should be out in the open and clearly visible.

Overnight Events (On- or Off-Site)

In addition to following all of the Basic Procedures, events involving children and youth spending the night at the church must adhere to these guidelines.

Permission Slips: All children and youth participating in overnight events must have written consent and a medical release form on file. Permission slips must include how to reach parents in an emergency.

Special Training Requirements: In accordance with the State of Texas guidelines, anyone serving as a sponsor of an overnight event must view a video on a child abuse and take a test in order to be certified to serve. This video and test is available at the District Office and on the Conference's youth website: www.reachingyouth.org.

Sleeping Arrangements: Co-ed overnight ministry events require co-ed adult leaders. Female staff and volunteers will supervise female children/youth in their sleeping quarters and male staff and volunteers will supervise male children/youth in their sleeping quarters. Married couples should not stay together but shall observe the female/female and male/male sleeping arrangements. With the exception of a parent/child combination, an adult and child/youth are not to occupy the same bed or sleeping bag. The two adult rule applies. Sleeping accommodations shall include a sleeping distance of no less than 3 feet between adults and participants.

When staying in places where the above sleeping arrangements are not possible (i.e. hotel rooms, dorms, or camping tents that sleep 2 to 4 people), youth may be assigned to rooms and adults assigned to separate rooms. The adults should sleep in rooms/tents between the youth rooms. Adults should make arrangements to check on the youth rooms on a random schedule during the night or to take shifts to stay awake and make sure that there are no illicit comings and goings. Hotel rooms should open to the interior of a building rather than the outside to minimize danger from the street. Parents should be notified of sleeping arrangements in advance.

Bathroom Arrangements: Males and females should have different bathroom facilities located in different parts of the building. Males and females should remain separate while dressing and grooming at the end of the day or in the morning. We do not have adequate shower facilities on-site for male and female participants and adults to take showers during lock-ins that take place on the MUMC campus at the same time. Shower times may be scheduled at separate times for boys and girls if needed.

Off-site Procedures

Permission Slips: Prior written parental (or guardian) permission is required for events requiring transportation to and from the event.

Driver Requirements: All drivers of vehicles for church or other sponsored events described herein must be at least 25 years of age and possess a current, valid driver's license, have proof of insurance at the State minimum rates, and not be otherwise disqualified from driving (i.e. – under medication and the like). The "Rule of Three" applies here; a single occasional volunteer is not permitted to drive a single, unrelated child or youth. Drivers must agree to obey safety and traffic laws and refrain from using a cell phone or texting while driving.

Vehicles: All vehicles used in ministry, whether private or rented, must be in proper working condition with current tags and license. Each passenger must have a seat belt.

Youth Drivers: A driving-age youth may be allowed to drive him or herself and others to and/or from an event. This is the responsibility of the parent/guardian to monitor. MUMC cannot be responsible for students before they arrive at a youth activity or after they leave. Youth drivers will not be allowed to transport any unrelated individuals during an MUMC-sponsored event.

Private Residences: If it is considered necessary or beneficial to hold meetings and activities in private residences, this must be done with at least two adult workers present and with the knowledge of the parents of the children and/or youth in attendance.

Emergency Supplies: There must be access to a phone when groups are away from the church property. In addition, each vehicle should have a first aid kit. Each driver should have a copy of the permission slips and medical release forms for the children/youth in their vehicle.

Church Nursery/Child Care Identification Program

In order to release nursery children to a properly identified and preauthorized caregiver and to make sure that the parent/custodian parent or guardian can be located in case of an emergency, childcare workers will do the following:

1. Require all parents/custodial parents or guardians to sign their child in to the nursery for every event.
Childcare workers must collect the following information:
 - a. child's name and information such as allergies and medical conditions
 - b. parent/custodial parent or guardian's name
 - c. where they will be during this event (sanctuary, Sunday School room, etc.)
 - d. cell phone where they can be reached in an emergency
 - e. expected time of return
 - f. and identification of person(s) authorized to pick up the child.
2. Identify pick-up persons when necessary by photo identification and be ready to ask for further identification.

General Guidelines for Cyber Safety

Children and youth are growing up in an age of digital technology and communication. Websites, blogs and social media can be highly positive and effective way of reaching young persons in ministry as well as reaching out to the community. It also offers a way for staff and volunteers to "touch base" and stay connected with children, youth and families between Sundays. When using the internet and social media in ministry, it is important to be aware of the dangers and to take measures to protect yourself, the church and the children and youth we serve.

1. When posting photos of children or youth online, written parental permission must be obtained in advance. (Permission can be granted through registration forms, permission slips, release forms or by personal communication.)
2. Adult leaders must have advance parental permission to communicate with the children or youth by email, cell phone, instant message, text messaging, social media, or using any other form of online phone/video communication. Using the Rule of Three, all group or social media communications must include 2 adult leaders who serve as administrators/moderators. All groups must be closed, private, and shall require the site administrator's approval to join.
3. When communicating by email, do not "broadcast" email addresses. Use the "Bcc" option (blind carbon copy) so that each recipient sees only his or her address when a message is received.

4. Cyber Safety will be among the topics included in required Safe Sanctuaries training for staff and volunteers. This will include information describing the benefits and dangers of social media and how to stay safe online.
5. Staff and volunteers who are connected to children and youth via social media must recognize their role as a mentor and a representative of this body of Christ. Their words and images are therefore held to a higher standard. They must abstain from obscenities, profanity, vulgar language and sexually suggestive material. In addition, they should not promote content that might influence children and youth negatively, such as the use of drugs and alcohol.
6. Likewise, staff and volunteers who are connected with children and youth via social media or internet must agree not to use social media or the internet to bully, harass or make comments that derogatory with respect to race, religion, gender, sexual orientation, color or disability.

Protecting Vulnerable Adults

Screening Applicants for Ministry: Those wishing to serve in ministry with vulnerable adults should be carefully screened and provide an application and background check through Safe Gatherings.

Six Month Rule: No one should work in ministry with vulnerable adults until they have been actively involved at MUMC for at least six months.

Training: Workers should receive training about elder abuse and be aware of reporting procedures. First Aid and CPR training is recommended. Training should also include how to maintain appropriate interpersonal relationships and boundaries that will allow for development of strong friendship and fellowship, but reduce the likelihood of those friendships being taken advantage of.

Training for Staff and Volunteers

LOCAL TRAINING: Safe Sanctuaries Training must be included in annual trainings for all Sunday school teachers, youth sponsors, VBS volunteers and anyone else who regularly volunteers with children and youth. As appropriate, occasional volunteers, parents, and other congregational members will be encouraged to participate in a brief training session or policy overview, to aid in their understanding of the issues involved and their part in providing a safe environment.

The Pastor Parish Relations Committee will be responsible for making sure that staff are trained under this policy and will appoint or approve the trainer and the training material. The trained staff members are responsible for ensuring all volunteers receive the required training, prior to working with children and youth.

At the training, workers will be given a copy of the Safe Sanctuaries Covenant statement. They are to sign the covenant to abide by and cooperate with the church's policies and procedures for Safe Sanctuaries.

Training will include the following:

- Rationale for developing and implementing a child risk management policy
- Definition of child abuse in its various forms
- Indicators of abuse
- Discussion of state laws on reporting suspected abuse and MUMC's reporting procedure
- Presentation of the church policy and strategies for child risk management:
 - Screening procedures
 - General safety regulations and emergency reporting procedures
 - First aid and health-care procedures (location of supplies)
 - Transportation procedures

- Behavior management principles, techniques and tips
- Appropriate and inappropriate adult behavior
- Procedures for dealing with inappropriate adult behavior or charges or evidence of child abuse by a church worker

After receiving training, volunteers will sign the Safe Sanctuaries Covenant (see Appendix B).

RIO TEXAS CONFERENCE TRAINING: All persons working with children, youth, and vulnerable adults are required to be Safety Certified through the Rio Texas every 2 years. This process includes three steps:

- 1) An online application with 3 references and a background check.
- 2) A 1-2 hour online training through Safe Gatherings. This training satisfies the legal state requirement for child abuse training for adults who supervise overnight events for children and youth.
- 3) A 2 hour interactive training, which can be taken in-person or through a webinar.

RESPONDING TO ALLEGATIONS OF ABUSE OR NEGLECT/REPORTING PROCEDURES

Child Abuse Hotline (1-800-252-5400) Website (<http://txabusehotline.org>)

RESPONSE BY THE WITNESS:

If abuse is suspected by, observed by or disclosed to a volunteer, clergy or staff member of the church, that person shall do the following:

1. Take all allegations of abuse seriously. Respect the victim's privacy, as well as provide sympathetic concern for the victim and his or her family.
2. Ensure the protection of and tend to the immediate needs of the child, as the situation requires. **The safety of the victim must be the church's primary concern.** In the case of life threatening or emergency situations, call 911 immediately.
3. Notify the supervisor or staff member in charge of the event. If the staff person in charge is the one suspected of abuse, notify another staff member or the clergy. If clergy is suspected, notify the Chair of the Pastor Parish Relations Committee, who will notify the District Superintendent.
4. Report all suspected abuse or neglect within 48 hours to the Texas Department of Family and Protective Services (DFPS) Abuse Hotline (1-800-252-5400) or Website (<https://www.txabusehotline.org>).

State law requires any person who believes that a child, a person 65 years or older, or an adult with disabilities is being abused, neglected, or exploited to make a report. A person making a report in good faith is immune from civil or criminal liability and the name of the person making the report is kept confidential. Any person who suspects abuse and does not report it can be held liable for a Class-A misdemeanor. **Reporting abuse to the staff/clergy does NOT release the witness from the legal responsibility to report suspected abuse.** However a staff person can help gather information that will aid DFPS in their investigation such as name and age of child, address, household member's names and contact information.

5. Give written documentation to a pastor and/or the Chair of the PPR through the "Report of Suspected Incident of Child Abuse Form" (see Appendix C)
6. Maintain the confidentiality of the victim and the accused during the investigation process. Pastoral care should be available to all in this time of crisis.

7. Have the supervisor in charge at the event, a pastor or the chair of the PPR notify the parents of the victim and take whatever steps are necessary to assure the safety of the child until the parent(s) arrive. It is important to understand that the proper authorities must be notified even if the parent(s) does not wish the incident to be reported. If one or both of the parents is the alleged abuser, contact the proper authorities listed above and follow their advice about notification of the parents.

RESPONSE BY THE CHURCH:

1. A Response Team will be formed, normally consisting of the senior pastor, the chairperson of the PPR, and a lay person designated by the pastor. This team will do the following:
 - a. If accused is working in a volunteer or staff position with children, youth or vulnerable adults in the church, immediately, yet with dignity and respect for the sacred worth of the person, remove the accused from further involvement with children.
 - b. Follow up to ensure that a report has been made by the witness to DFPS.
 - c. If the suspected abuse occurred during a MUMC sponsored event, report the incident to the church's insurance company and the District Superintendent. The DS will report the allegation to the bishop's office.
 - d. Maintain care to protect all parties involved until the matter is resolved.
 - e. Follow the advice of legal counsel and the bishop (or the bishop's designated representative)
 - f. Cooperate and coordinate with DFPS regarding their investigation.
 - g. Document all findings.
 - h. Appoint one spokesperson, who will present a clear position statement of the church regarding abuse and include the policies and established procedures. This person will be the only person communicating to the press, the congregation and the authorities. The person chosen must be capable of speaking calmly and thoughtfully in the glare of cameras and microphones and be prepared to answer honestly without adding extra or unnecessary information. **None but the spokesperson should be authorized to speak to the media on behalf of the congregation.**
 - i. Statement to the Media: Local church staff shall alert the Rio Texas Conference Director of Communications and Media Support when a statement is requested or made to media. The Conference media center has guidelines available for communications with media about the incident(s) which may have been reported.
2. Records of allegations, including documentation by the Response Team, will be retained for 20 years and will be stored in a secure location.

Note: If the accused is a clergy (deacon or elder) member of an annual conference, local pastor or diaconal minister, provisions of Paragraph 361 and Paragraph 2701 of the 2012 Book of Discipline of the United Methodist Church must be followed.

Access to and Updating of Records

All applications and questionnaires filled out by staff and volunteers working for MUMC will be reviewed by the appropriate supervisors.

In cases in which allegations are made, appropriate leaders, professional staff, and the PPR shall have access to the information on these documents. In the case of a report of suspicious activity, the Response Team and appropriate legal authorities will have access to the information.

See Attached Appendixes:

Appendix A - Injury and Incident Form

Appendix B - Safe Sanctuaries Covenant

Appendix C - Report of Suspected Incident of Child Abuse