

# **SAFE SANCTUARY POLICY AND PROCEDURES**

**CLARENDON UNITED METHODIST CHURCH  
ARLINGTON, VIRGINIA**

**ADOPTED August 28, 2019**

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# **Safe Sanctuary Policy and Procedures**

## **Clarendon United Methodist Church**

### **Arlington, Virginia**

**Adopted August 28, 2019**

## **I. INTRODUCTION**

Scripture proclaims, and our United Methodist tradition teaches, that God cherishes all human beings, especially children. Jesus said, “Whoever welcomes [a] child in my name welcomes me.” (Matthew 18:5, NIV). “Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these.” (Matthew 19:14). Jesus also said, “If anyone causes one of these little ones – those who believe in me – to stumble, it would be better for them to have a large millstone hung around their neck and to be drowned in the depths of the sea.” (Matthew 18:6).

The United Methodist Church (UMC) affirms that “children must be protected from economic, physical, emotional, and sexual exploitation and abuse” (*2016 Book of Discipline, Social Principles* ¶162C), and that “God calls us to make our congregations safe places, protecting children and other vulnerable persons from sexual and ritual abuse, ... [and] creat[ing] communities of faith where children and adults grow safe and strong.” (*2016 Book of Resolutions, #3084*). The UMC General Conference Resolution “Reducing the Risk of Child Sexual Abuse in the Church” directs annual conferences and churches to implement procedures designed to reduce the risk of child sexual and other abuse (*2016 Book of Resolutions, #3084*). In the *Book of Discipline*, child abuse, sexual abuse, sexual misconduct, and sexual harassment are chargeable offenses for clergy and lay members (*2016, ¶2702*).

## **II. COMMITMENT AND SCOPE**

CUMC is committed to conducting its ministries in a manner that promotes the safety and spiritual growth of children, youth, and vulnerable adults, and of persons who work with children, youth, and vulnerable adults. To that end we pledge to:

- Follow reasonable safety measures in the selection and recruitment of workers.
- Implement appropriate operational procedures in all programs and events.
- Establish clear procedures for reporting suspected incidents of abuse that conform to state and local law, and to instruct our volunteers and paid staff to report all suspected incidents of abuse as outlined in these procedures.

- Educate and train workers with children, youth, and vulnerable adults on our policies and procedures, including methods of discipline and reporting suspected abuse.
- Inform parents of our policies, provide training for our teachers and other workers with children, youth, and vulnerable adults, and provide forums for learning concerning these issues for our congregation, parents, teachers, and other workers with children, youth, and vulnerable adults.

CUMC adopts this Safe Sanctuary Policy and Procedures document (“CUMCSSPP”) in concordance with the affirmation we recite at Baptisms 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*).

The CUMCSSPP shall, as of its adoption date, apply to all volunteers and paid staff, lay or clergy, who have direct contact with children, youth, or vulnerable adults during activities, programs or events organized or conducted by CUMC. (Retrospective reference checks and interviews shall not be required for employees and volunteers already serving with children, youth, or vulnerable adults as of the adoption date.)

### **III. DEFINITIONS**

For purposes of the CUMCSSPP, the following definitions shall apply:

1. “Child Abuse” shall mean an act or omission committed by a parent, care giver, or person in a position of trust, which is not accidental and which harms or threatens to harm a child’s physical or mental health or welfare.
2. “Direct Contact” shall mean the care, supervision, guidance, instruction, transportation, control of, or routine interaction with children, youth, or vulnerable adults.
3. “Physical Abuse” shall mean an act or omission that endangers a child, youth, or vulnerable adult’s physical or mental health, including any non-accidental physical injury caused by a caretaker or person in a position of trust. Physical abuse may result from punishment that is overly punitive or inappropriate to the individual’s age or condition, or from purposeful acts that pose serious danger to the physical health of a child, youth, or vulnerable adult.

4. “Sexual Abuse” shall mean physical contact of a sexual nature, or sexualized behavior, or any prohibited sexual act as defined by the laws of Virginia that is committed or allowed to be committed upon a minor by a caretaker, e.g., fondling, molestation, sexual propositions or enticement, pornography, or indecent exposure.

#### **IV. STAFF AND VOLUNTEER RECRUITMENT AND SELECTION GUIDELINES**

##### **A. Age**

Volunteers and paid staff recruited or hired to work with children and youth in any position of authority must be at least 21 years of age, and at least 5 years older than the age of the persons they are working to serve. Anyone not meeting these criteria may not serve in a role of authority; however, they may serve as supervised assistants to those in leadership positions.

##### **B. Six-Month Rule**

1. CUMC will not permit anyone to serve as a volunteer for church ministries with children, youth, or vulnerable adults unless the individual has been strongly connected with the church in some aspect (worship, small group, service, etc.) for at least six (6) months.

2. For individuals who have recently relocated, this requirement may be considered to have been met if satisfactory reference checks by the individual’s previous church can be verified by a pastor/leader.

3. In some situations, this rule will not be feasible, and may be waived on the basis of probation. If the six-month rule is waived, program leaders may use additional measures to screen the applicant at their discretion.

4. For church-wide family events, it is expected that parents will accompany children under the age of 12 throughout the event. Therefore, the six-month rule does not apply to volunteers for church-wide events. Children’s activities at church-wide events will be designed to take place in open spaces with multiple adults present.

##### **C. Application**

Applicants for paid and volunteer positions must complete and sign the “Employee/Volunteer Application” and related waivers giving CUMC permission to check references and background information.

#### **D. Reference Checks**

Church leaders will check three references for each primary worker, paid or volunteer. The reference checks will be conducted by phone, mail, or in person (i.e., not by email). For applicants for paid positions, additional former supervisors may be checked. The “Employee/Volunteer Reference Check” form should be completed by the person(s) conducting the reference check.

#### **E. Background Checks**

Upon initial application, and every three years thereafter, Criminal Records Screening checks shall be made of all clergy, paid staff, and volunteers to the extent permitted by law, to assess current or previous child abuse or sexual misconduct, criminal records, violent or pedophilic behavior.

#### **F. Prior Convictions**

Individuals who have been convicted of physical or sexual abuse or neglect may not work in any church-sponsored activity or program for children, youth, or vulnerable adults.

#### **G. Interview**

All employee applicants and new volunteer applicants will be interviewed for suitability for the work they desire to do. Interviews will be conducted by the leader of the program in which the applicant will work, or by other persons designated by the program leader. A team of interviewers may be used. CUMC policy and guidelines should be discussed during the interview. Interviewers should utilize/complete the “Employee/Volunteer Interview” form.

#### **H. Child Abuse Survivor Applicants**

Prior experience with abuse, and one’s recovery process, may be pertinent to suitability as a child or youth ministry worker. Applicants who are survivors of abuse should discuss this in confidence with the church representative who conducts their interview. Alternatively, the individual may request that the interview be conducted by a pastor. The following factors will be considered in determining the suitability of an applicant who is a survivor of child abuse:

- Whether the applicant has committed an act of child abuse or molestation
- Whether the applicant has received professional counseling
- The opinion(s) of references, especially professional counselors who have served the applicant;

- The opinion(s) of leaders in other churches or youth organizations in which the applicant has been involved
- How closely the church is able to supervise and monitor the position for which the applicant is applying.

## **I. Confidentiality of Information**

CUMC will maintain the confidentiality of all information received in the applicant selection process. Such information will be marked as “confidential,” and stored in a locked location with limited access granted only to church staff and others with a need to know. The Director of Discipleship is responsible for the implementation of these policies, and the church’s Business Administrator is responsible for the maintenance of confidential records.

## **J. Required Forms and Signatures**

In addition to completing the “Employee/Volunteer Application,” all applicants must complete and sign the “Authorization and Release for Criminal Records Screening” form as part of the application process.

## **K. Review and Acknowledgment of Policy and Procedures**

Prior to beginning work with children, youth, or vulnerable adults, and annually thereafter, volunteers and paid employees are required to sign a statement that they have read and agree to abide by the CUMCSSPP (“Employee/Volunteer Agreement” form)

# **V. STAFF AND VOLUNTEER SUPERVISION GUIDELINES**

## **A. Two-Adult Rule**

1. In general, two approved adults must be present at all times during meetings of children and youth. This applies to classroom activities, activities away from the church facility and when transporting children and youth.

2. Whenever possible, teachers will be assigned in teams of two or more per Sunday School hour to every class of children or youth. Concerted effort will be made to recruit sufficient numbers of volunteer teachers/leaders to permit such team teaching. On a discretionary, case-by-case basis, when two adults are not available, this rule may be met by having an adult float between classrooms.

3. Other church-sponsored or community groups of children or youth who meet at the church should have two or more adult leaders present.



4. In co-ed meetings of children or youth, both male and female adult leaders should be present.

5. If a group stays overnight at the church, or if a church sponsored group leaves the premises, two or more adult leaders must be present and must include at least one male and one female leader if the group is mixed gender. (See additional requirements for youth overnight outings in section V. H. of this document.)

6. During transportation for church-related activities, there may be one approved adult with multiple children in the vehicle.

**B. Approved Adult to Child Ratios**

CUMC strives to maintain the following ratios of ministry workers to children and youth whenever feasible. The church recognizes that in some circumstances achieving these ratios may not be possible, such as an unexpected number of children attending an event.

<b>Program</b>	<b>Workers</b>	<b>Children</b>
Nursery (0-3 yrs)	2	10
Sunday School	2	14
Youth Programs	2	16
Mid-week classes	2	14
VBS	2	14

**C. Nursery Check-In/Check-Out Procedure**

All parents/guardians utilizing the church nursery must observe the check-in/checkout procedure as outlined in the Nursery Policy Manual.

**D. Open Door Policy**

Classrooms and child care rooms may be visited without prior notice by church staff, parents/guardians or other designated volunteer church workers, at any time. Brief observations of child care rooms and classrooms of children under 18 should be conducted by the staff or the primary leader during all activities. Parents, clergy, and administrative and professional staff of the church have the right to visit and observe any children’s or youth activity at any time, unannounced.

## **E. Doors and Windows**

If classroom and office doors do not have a window allowing visibility from the hallway, they should remain open while occupied by children, youth, or vulnerable adults. Visibility windows should not be obstructed, e.g., by signage or adornments.

## **F. Individual Counseling**

One-on-one mentoring or consultation between an adult and a child must be conducted in a room or area that is in plain view of others. If possible, another adult should have knowledge of staff members' whereabouts and with whom they are meeting. Children and youth receiving individual counseling 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.

## **G. Touch**

1. Physical affection should be appropriate to the age of the child or youth. (For example, it is generally appropriate for a four-year-old to sit in a nursery worker's lap and give a kiss on the cheek, but it is not appropriate for a teenager and youth leader to behave this way.)

2. Touching should be initiated by the child or youth, or be in response to the child's need for comforting, encouragement, guidance, or affection. It should not be based upon the adult's emotional need.

3. Ideally, touching and affection should only be given in the presence of other children's ministry or youth workers (two-adult rule). This is especially important when diapering a baby or helping a young child change clothes or use the restroom.

4. A child's preference not to be touched should be respected.

5. Church workers are responsible to protect children under their supervision from inappropriate touching by others. Church workers must promptly discuss inappropriate touching or other questionable behavior by other workers with their ministry leader, staff member, or a pastor.

## **H. Outings Away from Church Property**

1. All children and youth participating in off-property, out-of-town, or over-night outings must have written Consent and a notarized Medical Release form from parent(s) or guardian(s). Consent and Medical Release forms may be completed/submitted on an annual basis; however, parents/guardians must still provide event-specific permission for their child's

participation and are responsible for updating their child's information on file with changes that may occur between regular annual submissions.

2. Drivers for children and youth events must be at least 25 years of age and have a valid driver's license and insurance.

3. Children and youth, and their leaders, must have access to a phone when they are away from church property. The church office or authorized church representative must be provided with such phone number(s) prior to the groups' departure.

4. If the outing involves water activities such as swimming, a certified lifeguard should accompany the group, or be present on site.

5. In no circumstance is one adult (other than the parent) to take a child or children on an overnight outing alone. On youth overnight outings, there will be a 1:7 approved adult to youth supervision ratio observed. Female approved adults will supervise female youth in their sleeping quarters and male approved adults will supervise male youth. With the exception of a parent/child combination, an approved adult and a child or youth will not occupy the same bed or sleeping bag.

## **I. Classroom Discipline**

All teachers and workers should follow the following discipline measures:

1. If a child is behaving inappropriately, the teacher or worker should tell the child specifically what they are doing that is not acceptable and state what the expected behavior is, e.g., "We do not throw the blocks. We use blocks for building."
2. If this measure is not effective, the child should be guided to another activity.
3. If inappropriate behavior continues, the child may be separated to work alone away from the other students.
4. If the child's disruptive behavior continues after these steps have been taken, the teacher should notify the Director of Discipleship who will talk with the child and work with the child's parents.
5. No physical punishment or verbal abuse, e.g., ridicule, is to be used at any time.
6. If separating the child within the classroom or removal of the child from the room becomes necessary, the situation will be discussed with the child's parents or guardian as soon as possible.

## **J. Gifts**

Volunteers and paid staff should not give gifts to individual children or youth without prior knowledge of the parent(s)/guardian(s) or responsible clergy. Any gift giving should be made on a group basis, or for special occasions only. Any gifts given to children and youth by staff or volunteers should be modest and appropriate to the occasion.

## **VI. ONLINE AND SOCIAL MEDIA INTERACTIONS**

### **A. Posting of Likenesses**

No posting of the likeness of a child or youth under 18 years of age shall be made on a publicly available, CUMC-controlled webpage (i.e., without a login requirement) absent the prior written consent of the child's parent(s)/guardian(s). In addition, any posting of a child or youth likenesses shall not include the person's name, address or phone number.

### **B. Staff Social Media Accounts**

No official church business should be conducted through a paid staff's personal social media account. However, staff may share posts from the church's main profile. If necessary, staff is encouraged to create a church-business only social media account that reflects their job title. That account is subject to Staff Parish supervision and audit at any given time.

### **C. Group Social Media Accounts**

If there is a need to create social media profiles for individual church groups, the person responsible for the church's official social media accounts should be added as an administrator using the church's official profile and not a personal one.

### **D. Direct Messaging**

In general, cyber-communications between staff or volunteers and individual children or youth should be limited to communications for administrative and organizational purposes. Prior to engaging in direct messaging (email, text, calls, instant messaging, chats, etc.) with children or youth, staff and volunteers should have written consent from parents/guardians. Cyber-communications with individual children or youth, particularly if they are not solely administrative or organizational in nature, should be preserved (electronic paper trail).

## **E. Privacy Settings**

For online “groups” that involve children and youth, privacy settings should be set to “secret” (“closed” may not be sufficient) to prevent public discovery through search engines. Location settings should also be set to “private” to avoid inadvertent sharing of child and youth locations.

## **VII. TRAINING**

### **A. Child Protection**

Prior to working with children or youth, workers must undergo child protection safety training. A minimum of four hours of initial training on issues of child sexual abuse in church settings shall be required for all clergy, paid staff and volunteers who regularly supervise youth activities (e.g. youth group leaders) and all other church employees. In addition, a summary of current child abuse statutes and reporting requirements for the State of Virginia should be made available to all clergy, paid staff and volunteers who regularly supervise youth activities, Church Council members and all other church employees.

### **B. First Aid and CPR**

1. Church employees who supervise children and youth must maintain current certification in basic first aid and CPR. New employees must obtain this certification within 90 days of beginning employment. The church will pay expenses for this training.

2. Volunteers who work regularly with children or youth must maintain CPR certification. Nursery workers and others who work with young children may be requested to obtain additional training in infant and toddler CPR. The church will pay expenses for this training.

3. Other volunteers are encouraged, but not required, to obtain first aid and CPR training if they frequently accompany children or youth in such activities as: water sports, camping, home-building mission trips, etc. Subject to prior agreement/approval, the church will pay expenses for this training.

4. Outings away from church property will require at least one adult leader who is certified in CPR and First Aid.

## **VIII. RESPONSE BY CHURCH WORKERS TO ALLEGATIONS OF ABUSE**

### **A. Obligation to Report**

It is our legal and moral responsibility to report suspected abuse whenever it comes to our attention regardless of where that abuse takes place. Virginia law requires persons who have reason to suspect child abuse or neglect to report the matter immediately to the local department of the county or city where the child resides or where the abuse or neglect is believed to have occurred, or to the Virginia Department of Social Services Child Abuse and Neglect Hotline (1-800-552-7096), including, among others, the following:

- “Any teacher or other person employed in a public or private school, kindergarten or nursery school,”
- “Any person providing full-time or part-time child care for pay on a regularly planned basis,”
- “Any person 18 years of age or older associated with or employed by any public or private organization responsible for the care, custody or control of children,”
- “Any minister ... or duly accredited practitioner of any religious organization or denomination usually referred to as a church, unless the information supporting the suspicion ... is required by the doctrine of the religious organization or denomination to be kept ... confidential.”

Code of Virginia § 63.2-1509(A)(5), (6), (11) & (19) (as amended July 1, 2019).

### **B. Reporting Procedures**

1. If abuse is suspected by, observed by, or disclosed to a volunteer or paid staff member of the church, that person should do the following:
  - a. Ensure the protection of, and tend to the needs of the victim as appropriate (e.g., remove the victim from vicinity of the suspected abuser, seek emergency medical care if needed, or take other steps to ensure the victim’s safety.)
  - b. IMMEDIATELY notify the program or event supervisor.

- c. Together with the program or event supervisor:
- Contact Arlington County Child Protective Services (CPS) at 703-228-1500. **This is a requirement of the law.** Request and follow CPS guidance/instructions regarding whether to contact law enforcement authorities.
  - DO NOT attempt an investigation. Leave that to professionals.
  - Notify the Senior Pastor. (If the Pastor is the accused party, notify the Chair of the Staff Parish Relations Committee (SPRC) and the District Superintendent.)
  - Document the incident on the “Report of Suspected Abuse” form.
  - Provide the completed “Report of Suspected Abuse” form to the Senior Pastor and/or Chair of the SPRC.
2. The Pastor (or other person designated by the Pastor or the SPRC) will notify the parents of the victim and take whatever steps are necessary to assure the safety of the victim until parent(s)/guardian(s) arrive. (If one or both parents is the alleged abuser, follow CPS advice regarding notification of the parents.)
  3. Once the suspected abuse is reported to authorities, The Pastor (or designee) will report the incident to the church’s insurance company, and the District Superintendent. The District Superintendent will report the allegation to the Bishop’s office. (If the accused is a clergy member of an annual conference, local pastor, or diaconal minister, applicable provisions of Book of Discipline must be followed.)
  4. Once the proper authorities have been contacted and the safety of the child or youth is secured, the pastor or other designated person may tell the accused that a report has been made. If the accused is a volunteer or paid staff of the church, that person shall be relieved temporarily of his or her duties until the investigation is finished. If the accused is a paid staff person of the church, arrangements should be made to either maintain or suspend his or her income until the allegations are cleared or substantiated.
  5. Contact with the media should be handled by a pre-determined spokesperson. Care should be taken to safeguard the privacy and confidentiality of all involved. The spokesperson should generally convey that the matter is under investigation and that any comments made prior to the conclusion of the investigation would be premature.
  6. A list of emergency numbers will be available to the staff at all times.

7. The written “Report of Suspected Abuse” shall be filed in a secure place to maintain confidentiality, and shall be kept to ensure on-going ministry to, and advocacy for, victims and others involved. The report shall be brief and contain only factual information relevant to the situation. It shall be written in ink or typed to prevent it from being changed. The church must also file a copy of the report with the Bishop’s Office, where it shall remain confidential.

## **IX. ACCIDENT / INJURY REPORTING**

In the event that a child or youth is injured during a CUMC event or program occurring on church grounds or during a church-sponsored event away from church property, and requires the administration of first aid or outside medical assistance, the program or activity leader should complete an “Accident Report” form (or record the equivalent information in writing) to document the event. The report should be brief and contain only factual information relevant to the incident. The completed form should be given to the program or event supervisor.

## **X. PERIODIC REVIEW OF SAFE SANCTUARY POLICY AND PROCEDURES**

Review of the CUMCSSPP will be initiated by the Education Committee at least every five years. Updates and amendments will be made based upon changes in, e.g., Virginia state and local laws and regulations, Virginia UMC Conference requirements and recommendations, and CUMC insurance carrier requirements. Those reviewing and amending this policy should be stakeholders in the welfare of the children, youth, and vulnerable adults served by CUMC, and should include the Senior Pastor, Director of Discipleship, Director of Worship Arts, and CUMC Church Council, SPRC, and Trustees.