



**New Beginnings United Methodist Church**

Birmingham, Alabama • A Place of Possibilities and Transformation

## **SAFE SANCTUARY POLICY**

**Adopted February 2017**

### **INTRODUCTION**

Every ministry or event of New Beginnings United Methodist Church that relates to children and youth in its programming or oversight shall provide conscientious and intentional supervision. These procedures are designed to reduce the risk of abuse to the children, youth and vulnerable persons and to protect the staff and volunteers from unwarranted accusations.

### **VULNERABLE PERSONS**

All Safe Sanctuary policies and procedures shall apply in the care of vulnerable persons. In addition, age-appropriate training, including training for dealing with special needs (including personal hygiene issues), will be conducted and verified annually for volunteers and employees who work with vulnerable adults.

### **THEOLOGICAL FOUNDATION**

#### *Biblical Mandate*

“Then Jesus took a little child and put her among them; and taking her in his arms, he said to them, ‘whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me; and whoever welcomes me welcomes not me but the one who sent me’” (Mark 9:36-37). Jesus also said, “If any of you put a stumbling block before one of these little ones... it would be better for you if a great millstone were fastened around your neck and you were drowned in the depth of the sea” (Matthew 18:6).

#### *Our Commitment in Baptism*

The Church, above all institutions, is called to welcome and nurture all children. Our goal is to maintain a safe, secure, loving place where children may grow and where those who care for them may administer to their needs in responsible ways.

#### *Statement of Covenant*

We uphold the idea that to report abuse is to be a witness to the world of the love and justice of God and fully recognize that reporting abuse is a form of ministering to the needs of those crying out for help. Simply, to report abuse can help to stop existing abuse and prevent further abuse.

As caring Christians, we are also committed to protect and advocate for children participating in the life of the church. The Church, at all levels of its organization, is entrusted with the responsibility of providing an emotionally and physically safe, spiritually grounded, healthy environment in which children, youth, and adults are protected from abuse. Additionally, we care for abused children and their families by offering resources that will contribute to healing.

## **DEFINITIONS**

Child - a person under nineteen (19) years of age (§ 26-16-2, Ala. Code 1975).

Vulnerable Person - any person, regardless of age, whose behavior indicates that he or she is mentally incapable of adequately caring for himself or herself and his or her interests without causing adverse consequences to himself or herself or others, or who, because of physical or mental impairment, is unable to protect himself or herself from abuse, neglect, exploitation, sexual abuse, or emotional abuse by others. (definition taken from the "Adult Protective Services Act of 1976", Ala. Code (1975) §38-9-2(1), but expanded to include vulnerable children).

Volunteer - a person nineteen (19) years of age or older who assists in conducting activities involving children.

Employee - any person employed by the church who is responsible for activities involving children.

Child abuse - harm or threatened harm to a child's health or welfare by a person responsible for the child's health or welfare or by a person in a position of trust, which harm occurs or is threatened through non-accidental physical or mental injury or sexual abuse (§ 26-16-2, Ala. Code 1975).

## **POLICIES AND PROCEDURES**

The policies and procedures set forth below will apply to all people who give supervision or have custody of minors or who have opportunity to have contact with minors in church facilities or church sponsored activities whether clergy, paid staff, or volunteer. This policy will address four areas that are critical for the protection of the children, our employees, our volunteers, and our church. Those four areas include: selection process, protection policy, reporting procedures, and responses to allegations.

### **I. Selection Process:**

- A. Current or new employee
  1. Receive a written job description
  2. Complete an application form with 3 reference checks
  3. Complete a background check consent form
  4. Receive appropriate clearances on social security number trace, state criminal, and national/multi-jurisdictional criminal (including sex offender registry) background checks to work with minors
  5. Undergo personal interview
  6. Attend Safe Sanctuary Training
  7. Renew background check every 3 years

- B. Regular, Occasional, and Last-minute volunteers
  - 1. Complete an application form with references
  - 2. Complete a background check consent form  
Receive appropriate clearances on social security number trace, state criminal, and national/multi-jurisdictional criminal (including sex offender registry) background checks to work with minors
  - 3. Attend Safe Sanctuary Training
  - 4. Renew background check every 3 years

All records, forms, and reports will become a part of the church's confidential Safe Sanctuary filing system. The files will be maintained by the church administrator or by a designated person at the Senior Pastor's discretion.

## **II. Protection Policy:**

- A. *Two Adult Rule* – Two non-related and non-cohabitating adult workers will be present with children during church-related activities. An adult supervisor acting as a “floater” will make unannounced visits frequently when the two-adult rule is not feasible. Floaters shall be qualified as leaders for the age group they are supervising, be responsible only for rooms in their line of sight at all times, and have serving as a floater as their sole responsibility. In a room where there is a husband and wife team, they will be considered as one worker for the purposes of this policy.
- B. *Five Year Rule* – Every adult responsible for supervision shall be at least nineteen (19) years of age and at least five (5) years older than the oldest child participant.
- C. *Six Month Rule* – Any volunteer working with children must be a member or regular attendee of the church, with the approval of the Senior Pastor and the Staff-Parish Relations Committee, for at least six (6) months.
- D. *All activities should occur in open view:* Each room or space where activities involving children occur shall have visibility from an interior hallway or a connecting room by means of a window, a door with an uncovered window, or an open door. Care shall be taken to ensure that the full room is visible from outside of the room, and that parts of the room are not obstructed by furniture or other obstacles.
- E. *No child will be left unsupervised:* In the event that child care services are not provided, the parent/guardian shall be fully responsible for the supervision of his/her child (or children) during events. Said child (or children) shall remain in the presence of his/her parent/guardian, and at no time be left alone and unsupervised. Should the parent/guardian arrange for their own childcare/supervision within the event facility, said childcare/supervision shall be in compliance with the Safe Sanctuary

policies and procedures of the church. If parent/guardian refuses to comply with Safe Sanctuary policies and procedures, he/she and his/her child (or children) will be asked to leave.

- F. *Bathroom Needs*: When possible, children will be encouraged to take care of their own bathroom needs, but should a child require assistance, the outer bathroom door will remain open while a Safe Sanctuary certified volunteer assists the child with an additional volunteer being present. The bathroom and stalls will be checked before a child enters.
- G. *Transporting Children*: A Safe Sanctuary certified volunteer will ride the van when children are being transported from home to all church-related events and back to their home. In situations when personal vehicles are utilized, two non-related and non-cohabitating Safe Sanctuary certified volunteers must ride in the vehicle. Youth will not be allowed to drive themselves or other children and youth to church-related events unless permission forms have been signed by the parent/guardian of all those involved and are filed at the church office.
- H. *Off-Site and Overnight Events/Activities*:
1. Persons coordinating off-site and overnight events/activities will assure each child has appropriate forms on file (e.g., guardian permission, medication/medication instructions, and emergency contact information etc.) and take copies of these forms along on the event in a folder marked "Emergency Forms." Copies of these forms will be held by the church office, the trip leader, and the driver of the vehicle in which the child is riding, if not the trip leader.
  2. The following minimum ratios will be maintained for off-site and overnight events/activities:
    - a. Nursery – 4-years old: one adult to every three children
    - b. Kindergarten – Grade 6: one adult to every five children
    - c. Grades 7 – 12: one adult to every 7 youth
  3. Co-ed groups must have both male and female adults present.
  4. There shall be separate sleeping areas for male and females.
  5. One adult must be present in each sleeping area, and must be of the same gender as the children in that area.
  6. Adults must never share a bed with a child.
  7. Adjoining rooms must have an adult of the same gender.
  8. No adult should be alone in the room with a child at any time.

9. Random and regular rounds may be conducted by two (2) adult leaders (of the opposite sex of all sleeping areas) throughout the nighttime sleeping hours.
- I. *Outdoor programs or activities:* The person or volunteer in charge of the activity shall take appropriate measures to make sure that the setting is free of obvious safety hazards and suits the activity and that the children are properly supervised.
- J. *Outside Groups Meeting in Church Facilities:* The Board of Trustees and Safe Sanctuary Team require that all outside organizations review and agree to comply with the Safe Sanctuary policies and procedures. Outside groups should provide a letter certifying that volunteers and/or staff have satisfactorily completed background checks to include each volunteer/staff member's name and the expiration date of his/her background check, if he/she is providing child care.

### **III. Reporting Procedures:**

Alabama State Law encourages voluntary reporting of child abuse in faith-based ministry settings. In keeping with Christian beliefs that children should not be abused and neglected, New Beginnings United Methodist Church will practice and advocate voluntary compliance with the Alabama State Law suggesting reporting of suspected abuse/neglect of children.

- A. Allegations of suspected abuse/neglect will be reported by the Safe Sanctuary Team Coordinator to the Senior Pastor, the Department of Human Resources, and local law enforcement.
- B. A written abuse report is required to be placed to the authorities within 24 hours.
- C. Notification must also be given to the District Superintendent, the Bishop, and the communication department of the North Alabama Conference of The United Methodist Church.
- D. If the Senior Pastor or Associate Pastor(s) are accused of abuse, the Staff-Parish Relations Committee chairperson can directly report the incident to the District Superintendent.

\* Nothing in the accomplishment of this policy is intended to call upon a pastor to violate the confidentiality of confession or clergy counseling relationship. Being mindful of the complex nature of Child Abuse, reporting, training, and consultation will be available to clergy and laypersons to prepare them for a faithful response.

#### **IV. Response Procedures:**

- A. A quick, compassionate, and unified response to an alleged incident of child abuse is expected.
- B. All allegations will be taken seriously, with grace shown to all parties.
- C. The Senior Pastor will yield to the District Superintendent, and church personnel are not to undertake an investigation of the incident. However, in all cases of reported or observed abuse in a children's activity, all those present should be at the service of official investigation agencies.
- D. The church staff will not deny, minimize, or blame any individuals involved in the allegations. The church will minister to all involved and cooperate with authorities.
- E. The church will keep a Christian perspective on how the church portrays the incident to the community and let the law decide the opinions of truth.
- F. The church will show respect to both parties and as a community of faith, vow to keep these matters privy and provide the respect and privacy that the accused and accuser both so rightly deserve.