

# **Church of the Cross United Methodist Safe Sanctuary Policy**

Revised and Adopted October 20, 2015

## **Introduction**

Safe Sanctuary is the church policy to prevent child abuse at Church of the Cross United Methodist Church. This policy describes the rules the church will follow to ensure a safe environment for the children and youth participating in church programs and activities. These rules control the screening of employees and volunteers, the conduct of the programs, Safe Sanctuary training for employees and volunteers, and church response procedures to allegations of abuse.

This policy applies to all employees of Church of the Cross, except employees that are hired to work in the Church of the Cross World of Love Daycare Program. World of Love employees are covered by a daycare-specific Child Abuse Prevention Policy. Employees that are hired under the World of Love Child Abuse Prevention Policy requirements are considered to meet the corresponding Safe Sanctuary Policy requirements.

This policy also applies to all unpaid, volunteer personnel involved in child and youth related programs at Church of the Cross.

## **Safe Sanctuary Employee Requirements**

In addition to any and all requirements of the Education Work Area, all clergy and employees (except employees that work exclusively for the daycare) shall meet the following Safe Sanctuary requirements:

1. Read and sign the Safe Sanctuary Policy.
2. Complete background check and be rechecked a minimum of every three years.
3. Attend Safe Sanctuary training.

## **Safe Sanctuary Volunteer Requirements**

For purposes of the Safe Sanctuary Policy there are three categories of volunteers: Adult Supervisors, Adult Support Persons, and Youth/child Helpers. Adult Supervisors will have direct involvement with youth and children in church programs, e.g., youth group leaders. Adult Support Persons assist in the operation of youth and children programs but have no ordinary, unsupervised, direct involvement with youth or children, e.g., youth group meal providers. Helpers are persons under the age of 18 that volunteer to assist Adult Supervisors with program operation and have no unsupervised contact with the youth/children in the programs.

Each person who is to volunteer with children and/or youth at Church of the Cross United Methodist must complete the following specified screening steps.

		Adult Supervisor	Adult Support	Helper
1	Be an active church member, or actively participate in the life of the congregation with other adult members for at least six months prior to the volunteer effort.	X	X (may also include, those helping serve meals or VBS )	X
2	Complete and sign a <i>Volunteer Application</i> .	X		
3	Interview with the Christian Education Director or designated person assigned by the Education Work Area	X		
4	Sign a <i>Covenant Statement of Faith</i> after reviewing with the Christian Education Director during the interview.	X		
5	Participate in Criminal Records Check	X		
6	Attend Safe Sanctuary education seminars.	X		

Upon receipt of a signed *Volunteer Application*, the clergy will create and maintain a file for each volunteer. Each file will contain a *Screening Checklist*. The *Screening Checklist* documents the completion of each step in the volunteer screening process.

The Christian Education Director will complete the initial required screening steps and schedule the volunteer interview. Any adult volunteer may have a criminal record check requested at the discretion of the clergy, Christian Education Director, Education Work Area, or Church Council.

The Christian Education Director must be able to reach at least two of the three references provided in the application by telephone or mail. Documentation of each contact will be maintained in each volunteer file. The volunteer file may be accessed by clergy, Christian Education Director, Education Work Area, and legal counsel.

When information is gained during the screening process that makes an applicant unsuitable for volunteering with children, the Christian Education Director will meet privately with the applicant and explore other ministries he/she can be a part of at Church of the Cross.

Helpers are both volunteers and youth/children. Adult Supervisors are subject to all Safe Sanctuary rules in their interaction with Helpers.

## **Program Operating Policies and Procedures**

Safe Sanctuary operating policies and procedures are described in the following sections.

### **1. Requirements for Volunteers**

An Adult Supervisor is a minimum of 18 years of age, qualifies under the Five-Years-Older Rule, and has completed the Safe Sanctuary screening process.

An Adult Support Person is a minimum of 18 years of age and has completed the Safe Sanctuary screening process.

A Helper is under the age of 18.

## **2. Five-Years-Older Rule**

The Five-Years-Older Rule requires all Adult Supervisors to be a minimum of 5 years older than the oldest eligible participant in a youth program. An 18-year-old adult may work in the nursery to 5th grade classrooms. A 19-year-old adult may serve as a Supervisor for middle school students. A 23-year-old adult may serve as a Supervisor for senior high students.

## **3. Two-Adult Rule**

The Two-Adult Rule is an important and necessary part of the Operations Procedures at Church of the Cross United Methodist. The Two-Adult Rule requires the presence of two adult Supervisors at every child/youth ministry program including the nursery, Sunday school, children and youth music programs, and youth group. Two related adults can serve together under the Two-Adult Rule while using the adult roamer system. The roamer system requires an adult who is not related to the adult supervisors to be in the program area and able to randomly visit their area without notification. This rule does not require two adults to be with each group of children in the program when the roamer system is being used, e.g. two adults are not required in each children's Sunday school classroom. This rule greatly reduces the risk of child abuse and the risk of false accusations. This rule will protect children and give volunteers more confidence. If the Two-Adult Rule is violated, the volunteer must submit an *Exception To The Two-Adult Rule Report* to the church office. *Exception To The Two-Adult Rule Reports* will be collected in the church office and reviewed at each Education meeting.

## **4. Limited Counseling**

Occasionally, the privacy and trust protections necessary for effective counseling of minor youth/children will compete with the obligations of this Safe Sanctuary Policy. Indeed, one of the objectives of Safe Sanctuary is to foster an environment where youth/children will feel open to approach adult leaders with any needs. When counseling is taking place the person in charge must determine in the initial meeting if he/she is qualified to address the need effectively. If the problem is not resolved in three sessions the child or youth must be referred to a professional counselor. The Senior Pastor must be made aware of all counseling sessions. The door to the room where the counseling session is taking place must remain open at all times.

## **5. Overnight Rule**

Children involved in an overnight program must have a signed parental consent form. The Two Adult Rule will be followed with the additional provision that mixed gender ministry events require at least one adult male and one adult female to be present for the full event.

## **6. Classroom Door Policy**

Unobstructed, transparent windows in classroom doors will allow other adults to look inside classrooms to reduce secrecy and isolation. If appropriate, the door should remain open to reduce the risk further.

## **7. Identification Procedures**

The church will use a clear identification procedure to match children/youth with parents, guardians, or properly designated person. A properly designated person is a person that has been authorized on a *Transportation Authorization Form* by the parents or guardians to transport their children. Adult Supervisors need to remain with all children/youth until all are properly identified. After the scheduled time for a ministry event the church modifies the Two-Adult Rule. One adult must stay with the child/youth until a parent, legal guardian, or properly designated person picks up the child/youth at the ministry site. When a single Adult Supervisor is required to stay with children/youth an *Exception To The Two-Adult Rule Report* will be filled out and submitted to the church office.

## **8. Ministry Program Driving Procedures**

Adult Supervisors and Adult Support people of 21 years of age and older with a valid driver's license may transport children/youth to and from the church for ministry programs. The Two-Adult Rule is in place for the transporting of youth to and from events. A youth with a driver's license and personal transportation may drive only himself/herself and siblings to the ministry site. This rule controls the transportation of children/youth between the church and the location of the designated activity. This rule does not control the transportation of children/youth between their home and the church.

## **9. Discipline**

Volunteers and staff will use positive reinforcement, positive redirection, and parent conferences to disciple children/youth. All staff and volunteers will receive training on appropriate discipline. Nobody from the church will use physical discipline on a child/youth.

## **10. Incident and Injury Report Forms**

Any accident requiring medical attention needs to be documented immediately by the Adult Supervisor and reported to the responsible staff person. Any incident involving children/youth, which violates the Safe Sanctuaries Operating Policy or the well-being of another person, needs to be documented by the Adult Supervisor and reported to the responsible staff person.

## **11. Social Media**

You must not use any obscenities, profanities or vulgar language. Please refrain from postings of alcohol use, drug use or sexual behaviors. Social media will not be used to bully or intimidate a child/youth; no derogatory comments in respect to race, religion, gender, sexual orientation, disability; no threats to stalk, haze or injure another person. Do not send jokes, stories, images, etc., that are inappropriate for the child's/youth's age

or development. Items sent to children under fifth grade should be “G” rated and youth should be “PG” rated at the highest.

## **Training and Education of Child Ministry Volunteers/Workers**

Everyone needs to be aware of the causes and signs of child abuse, what steps to take to protect children/youth and what procedures to follow if abuse is suspected or witnessed.

### **1. Pastors, Employees and Volunteers**

The pastors, church employees, and volunteers have an obligation to be knowledgeable about child abuse and the reporting of any and all suspected or witnessed incidences of abuse. Not only are these people responsible for the well-being of the children/youth on a day-to-day basis, they are also perceived by the community and children as special and trustworthy individuals.

All pastors, employees and Adult Supervisors will participate the designated Safe Sanctuary Training Program. Each pastor, employee and Adult Supervisor will have “renewal” training at least every three years. The training will include: a video presentation; definition and recognition of abuse; COTC policy/procedures to include required paperwork; and what to do if abuse is suspected or witnessed.

New pastors and employees will attend training as part of the employment process. Training will begin after the screening process has been completed. All current volunteers will be trained within 90 days of initial policy implementation. New volunteers will be trained when he or she expresses a desire to volunteer in children or youth programs.

### **2. Parents and Children/Youth**

Parents have an obvious interest and responsibility in protecting their children from abuse. An understanding of the causes and effects of abuse will assist them in making sound decisions with regard to their children and in recognizing symptoms of abuse exhibited by their children/youth. Children/youth, too, can help to protect themselves by having a simple, practical appreciation of potential risks and appropriate responses.

Safe Sanctuary training will be made available to the parents of children/youth involved in ministry programs. Additional training or seminars may be made available as deemed appropriate.

### **3. Procedures for Education and Training**

A pastor or designated staff person is assigned by the Education Work Area to supervise Safe Sanctuary education and training. Training content and materials will be controlled by the Education Work Area or their designated representatives. A training syllabus will be maintained that defines the materials and procedures used in the Safe Sanctuary training. The syllabus may be updated or modified at the Education Work Area’s discretion. The training supervisor may designate and train additional authorized Safe Sanctuary trainers. The training supervisor will maintain training records that document all training session dates, trainer, and attendees.

All pastors and employees will receive Safe Sanctuary training within 45 days of their starting date at Church of the Cross. Adult Supervisors will have two weeks to complete their Safe Sanctuary training after beginning to volunteer. Additionally, renewal training must be done annually. The training supervisor will ensure that pastors and employees are current in their training and that periodic refresher training is available to all Adult Supervisors. Adult Supervisors whose training expires will be removed from children/youth related activities until their training is made current.

## **Reporting Policy**

### **1. Ohio Reporting Requirements**

Ohio Revised Code Sec. 2151.421 requires an individual, acting in an official or professional capacity (clergy and employees), to report immediately any suspected or actual act of child abuse, perpetrated by any person, to the county Children Services Board or agency or a police officer. Other persons (volunteers) may also report suspected or actual child abuse. All pastors, employees and volunteers of Church of the Cross are to be familiar with the requirements of Sec. 2151.421. Agents of Church of the Cross who are obligated to report to the civil authorities will do so without delay.

Ohio Revised Code Sec. 2151.421 provides that anyone participating in good faith in making such a report shall be immune from civil or criminal liability. On the other hand, failure to report, when required to do so, can result in a criminal (misdemeanor) charge. The person making the report and other appropriately involved church personnel will cooperate with the civil authorities, while retaining the right to seek guidance and legal counsel from officials of Church of the Cross. The person making the report shall, at all times, retain the right to employ or consult with personal legal counsel.

### **2. Reporting to Church Authorities**

Any pastor, employee, or volunteer who witnesses an act of child abuse; suspects or otherwise has reason to believe that such an act has occurred; or receives a report of such an act must report immediately to the Senior Pastor. If the Senior Pastor is not available, the report is to be made to the Director of Christian Education. If the Director of Christian Education is not available, the report is to be made to the Chairperson of the Church Council. If the Senior Pastor is alleged to be the abuser, the report shall be made to the Chairperson of the Church Council and the District Superintendent of the Miami Valley District of the West Ohio Conference of the United Methodist Church. The report shall be made on the approved form.

If the reported incident has not already been reported to the civil authorities, the individual receiving the report shall comply with all Ohio reporting requirements.

The Senior Pastor will immediately notify the District Superintendent, church legal counsel and Church of the Cross' casualty insurance carrier.

## **Steps to Report Abuse**

Church of the Cross will respond to allegations of child abuse in a distinctly Christian manner, consistent with appropriate civil requirements and guidelines. We humans are

fallen in sin yet created in the image of God. Our response will acknowledge this dichotomy in treating all parties with respect and love yet effectively acting on the realities of the situation.

1. Church of the Cross will seriously accept any allegation but without prejudice. We as a church body will not deny or minimize any legitimate claim.
2. The child is to be protected from any immediate further harm.
3. The accused is on site and a danger is perceived the Kettering Police Department is to be called or 911, abuse will be reported to Children Services or local police department.

### **1. Notification**

Church of the Cross will act immediately on any allegation.

1. The staff person or volunteer will immediately report the incident to the person in charge of the ministry.
2. The person in charge, the Christian Education Director, Youth Director or Music Director shall immediately report the allegations to the senior pastor. If the Senior Pastor is the alleged perpetrator or is out of contact then the chairperson of Church Council will be notified in place of the senior pastor.
3. The Senior Pastor/Chairperson of the Church Council shall immediately report the allegations to the District Superintendent.
4. The parents/guardian shall be informed immediately. If the parents are the alleged perpetrator then follow the advice of Children Services or local police.
5. The District Superintendent will report the allegations to the Assistant Bishop of the West Ohio Conference.
6. Alleged perpetrator will be informed that they have been removed from further ministry involvement until the legal/civil charges have been resolved.
7. As is appropriate for the specific situation and as desired by those involved, prayer support is to be initiated. This prayer support would likely be a small, confidential, dedicated group rather than the customary church prayer chain.

### **2. Reporting**

While notification is going on, Children's Services or the local police department will be called to make a report. If reporting by phone, it is advisable to have another person in the room to witness the call.

### **3. Documentation**

Documentation of the events shall be carefully taken. All actions, decisions and steps taken are to be reported and recorded.

1. The person in charge when the alleged abuse was observed or disclosed will fill out a Report of Suspected Incident of Child Abuse.
2. This report will be written in ink or typed.
3. This report will be used to record all information including when calls or contact was made, who with, and dates and times.

#### **4. Care and Healing**

1. The Church will provide support for the victim and the victim's family.
2. Pastoral care and resources will be made available.

#### **Communication**

The confidentiality of all involved will be protected. All communication with the media will come through the individual designated by the Senior Pastor or Chairperson of Church Council.

#### **Policy Implementation**

The effective date for this policy is the date that the Church Council voted acceptance of the policy and/or revisions. The Education Work Area or designated representatives have six calendar months from the policy acceptance date to complete the policy implementation. Existing adult volunteers will fill out Volunteer Applications and Authorizations for Background Checks but the reference and background check requirements are waived. Current clergy, employee, and volunteer training will be completed in the implementation phase.

#### **References**

**Safe Sanctuaries: Reducing the Risk of Child Abuse in the Church**

**Miami Valley District of the United Methodist Church website**

I have read and understand the Church of the Cross Safe Sanctuary Policy. I agree to abide by the procedures and provisions of the Safe Sanctuary Policy.

Signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

Printed Name \_\_\_\_\_

Witness \_\_\_\_\_