

The scope of this policy and its provisions shall apply to all staff and volunteers, clergy or lay, who have direct or indirect contact with children, youth, or vulnerable adults at Concord Trinity United Methodist Church 5275 S. Lindbergh Blvd., St. Louis, Missouri 63126.

# Concord Trinity UMC Safe Sanctuary

Policy and Procedures for Safe Ministry  
with Children, Youth or Vulnerable Adults

# **Policy for Safe Ministry with Children, Youth, or Vulnerable Adult**

## **Introduction**

The General Conference of the United Methodist Church in April 1996 adopted a resolution aimed at reducing the risk of all forms of child abuse in the church. The Social Principles of the United Methodist Church state “. . . children must be protected from economic, physical, and sexual exploitation, and other abuse.” God calls us to make our churches safe places, protecting children and other vulnerable persons from all forms of exploitation and abuse. God calls us to create communities of faith where children and adults can participate in ministry in a safe and secure environment. At Concord Trinity United Methodist Church (CTUMC) located at 5275 S. Lindbergh Blvd., St. Louis, Missouri, we desire that all people be invited to worship, grow and serve with Christ in an environment of mutual respect that reflects God’s love and grace.

The disturbing and traumatic rise of physical and sexual abuse of children, youth and vulnerable adults has claimed the attention of our nation and society. Abuse is any inappropriate sexual contact, indecent exposure, or communication for immoral purposes, as well as physical abuses such as corporal punishment or physical assault. The law recognizes that minors cannot consent to sexual contact or physical abuse because of their age and vulnerability. The following statements reflect the commitment of CTUMC to provide a safe environment for all children, youth and vulnerable adults and church workers who participate in church-sponsored ministries.

Thus, in covenant with all United Methodist congregations, we have developed this policy for the protection of children and prevention of abuse in our church.

## **Purpose**

The purpose of this document is to ensure that the church members and staff of Concord Trinity UMC do all they can to provide a safe and secure environment for nursery age, preschoolers, children, youth and all vulnerable adults entrusted to our care. The following policies and procedures are for the protection of our children, youth, employees, volunteers, connectional relationships in the United Methodist Church and our entire church family at Concord Trinity UMC, St. Louis, Missouri. By establishing these policies and procedures, we demonstrate our commitment to provide a safe environment for our children, youth and vulnerable adults as they grow in their relationship with God. Although it is unlikely that we can completely prevent abuse in every circumstance, it is possible for us to greatly reduce the risk of abuse by following these procedures.

## **Statement of Covenant**

In an effort to provide a safe community, Concord Trinity UMC requires all church employees and volunteers to commit themselves to the Safe Sanctuary Policy for the Protection of Children, Youth and Vulnerable Adults adopted by the Governance and Oversight Board of CTUMC. This policy does not preclude or prohibit the reporting of suspected abuse occurring outside the parameters of this policy.

- We pledge to conduct ourselves in a manner consistent with the teachings of Christ who modeled love of God and love of others with dignity, humility and compassion.
- We will follow reasonable safety measures in the selection and recruitment of workers.
- We will implement “common sense” procedures in our ministries to protect those vulnerable.
- We will educate our children and youth workers, both paid and volunteer, regarding the use of appropriate procedures.
- We will inform parents and our congregation of our policies and procedures.

- We will clearly define procedures for reporting a suspected incident of abuse that conforms to the requirements of the laws of the State of Missouri.
- We will prepare to respond to the media should such an incident occur.
- We will keep our District Superintendent informed of any incidents or allegations.

### **Conclusion**

In all our ministries with children and youth, this congregation is committed to demonstrating the love of Jesus Christ so that each child will be “. . . surrounded by steadfast love, established in the faith, and confirmed and strengthened in the way that leads to eternal life.” (Baptismal Covenant II, UMH p. 44) Concord Trinity UMC takes seriously its responsibility to provide a safe and nurturing environment for children, youth and vulnerable adults who participate in our ministries as we seek to live out our baptismal calling to be Christ in the world through loving God and loving others. Everyone who serves with children and youth is playing a key role in fostering the spiritual development of individuals and families in a safe community environment and abuse by a worker, whether paid or volunteer, will not be tolerated.

The Local Church Certification Authority and Ministry Programming Staff will review this policy and the procedures “as needed”, with a regular review planned every two years from approval. Revisions will be presented to the Ministry Council and then the Governance Board for approval.

## CTUMC Safe Sanctuary Implementation Procedures

### Terms & Definitions:

#### Abuse

*Physical abuse* - Any deliberate act that inflicts bodily harm to a person.

*Sexual abuse* - Any sexual contact or sexually explicit language, gestures, or images by a volunteer or staff person with, or directed to, a child, youth or vulnerable adult.

*Neglect* - Failure to provide the basics of care necessary for the well-being of the child, youth or vulnerable adult.

*Emotional abuse* - Abuse which results in impaired psychological growth and development, including belittling, rejection, constant unequal treatment and verbal assaults.

#### Age Guidelines

*Nursery* – Persons birth through not age 2.

*Preschool* – Persons age 2 through not in Kindergarten.

*Elementary* – Persons Kindergarten through Grade 5.

*Child* – Persons birth through Grade 5.

*Youth* – Persons attending Grades 6-12. The state of Missouri defines children as 17 and under, but CTUMC abides by our definition of children and youth as those who are birth through attending 12<sup>th</sup> grade.

*Vulnerable adults* - Persons over 18 years of age with physical, mental and/or developmental disabilities that require supervision or personal care because they are not able to live independently.

*Adult* – Any person age 18 (and not still in high school) or older.

#### Worker Definitions

*Staff* – Any paid member identified through hiring or appointment holding responsibility or authority within Concord Trinity UMC. Staff members in the nursery/childcare ministry must be 16 years of age or older.

*Volunteer* - Any unpaid person not appointed official responsibilities or authorities within Concord Trinity UMC who donates their time, skills and efforts in which a Child, Youth or Vulnerable Adult may participate.

*Key Leader* - Any adult (Staff or Volunteer) with primary responsibility of overseeing, leading or coordinating the event or activity in which a Child, Youth or Vulnerable Adult may participate.

*Assistant* - Any person with secondary responsibilities in providing support for an event or activity in which a Child, Youth or Vulnerable Adult may participate. This person may be an Adult or Youth.

**Mandated Reporter –**

Any person with the responsibility for the care of children, youth and vulnerable adults is a mandated reporter. Missouri law states that if a caregiver has reasonable cause to suspect that a child has been or may be subjected to abuse or neglect, or observes a child being subjected to conditions or circumstances that would result in abuse or neglect, that person shall immediately report or cause a report to be made through the Missouri Child Abuse Hotline (1-800-392-3738) or the Elder Abuse and Neglect hotline (1-800-392-0210).

**Local Church Certification Authority –**

The Certification Authority is a group of 2-3 persons responsible for making Safe Sanctuary certification decisions at the local church level. Examples of who may be part of a Local Church Certification Authority include these possible positions; Director/Coordinator of Youth, Director of Children's Ministry, the Pastor, or the Staff Parish Chair. Local Church Certification Authority may also be referred to as Safe Sanctuary Certification Authority or Certification Authority.

## General Procedures

1. The Governance Board with input from the Ministry Council approves Concord Trinity's Safe Sanctuary policy. This policy is on file at the District Conference and available to the church members.
  - a. Staff and volunteers of Children, Youth and Vulnerable Adults will receive a copy of Concord Trinity's Safe Sanctuary policy.
  - b. Parents or Guardians of Children, Youth and Vulnerable Adults may download a copy of the Safe Sanctuary Policy online at [www.concordtrinity.org](http://www.concordtrinity.org) under the Downloads tab.
  - c. Copies of the Safe Sanctuary policy may also be picked up outside the church office in the information display.
  - d. The Safe Sanctuary policy should be reviewed every two years by two staff representatives involving Children, Youth and Vulnerable Adults along with two lay representatives involved with Ministry Council and/or Governance Board.
  
2. All Staff and Key Leaders involving Children, Youth and Vulnerable Adults shall be trained in Safe Sanctuary policies and procedures and be certified through the on-line certification process. Safe Sanctuary Certification requires completion of Safe Sanctuary on-line training, authorization for a national background screen, and completion of an interview (by phone or in person) with an authorized staff or key leader for Children, Youth or Vulnerable Adult Ministries. Applicants younger than 19 will not be required to authorize a national screen because records of criminal convictions for minors are sealed from public scrutiny. Once a person is Safe Sanctuary certified, the certification is valid for four years.
  - a. Background checks for CTUMC's Staff and Key Leaders will be paid for through the church budget. Background checks for volunteers or other organizations using or renting the church's facilities are the responsibility of that organization.
  - b. Final decisions regarding who receives Safe Sanctuary certification is determined by the Local Church Certification Authority or Certification Authority. Certification is a privilege and not a right and does not guarantee the certified candidate a particular position working with children or youth.
  - c. Certification and National Background Screens must be updated every four years from date of previous Certification.
  - d. Persons who do not hold current Certification will not be allowed to serve as Staff or Key Leaders with Children, Youth or Vulnerable Adults.
  
3. Concord Trinity UMC (CTUMC) will adopt a tiered approach in vetting Staff and Volunteers that work with Children, Youth and Vulnerable Adults. This tiered approach allows a common sense approach in balancing safety with written policy to all parties. The intent is to provide a safe environment surrounding the Children, Youth and Vulnerable Adults at any CTUMC event, but still allow the maximum number of volunteers to assist. It is our expectation that at least one adult will be trained in Safe Sanctuary policies and procedures at any church-sponsored event involving Children, Youth and Vulnerable Adults.
  - a. Staff – These persons must be trained on the implementation of CTUMC's Safe Sanctuary policy, complete Missouri Conference Safe Sanctuary training, and have a national background screen. Certification, according to the policies set by the UMC Missouri Conference, is valid for four years.
  - b. Key Leaders – These persons will be trained on the implementation of CTUMC's Safe Sanctuary policy, complete the Local Church on line Safe Sanctuary training, and have a national background screen. Once trained, certification will be valid for four years. Examples of persons in this category include Sunday School Teachers, Youth Ministry Leaders, Key Vacation Bible School Leaders, Nursery Volunteers, etc.

- c. Assistants – Volunteers (such as chaperones, VBS assistants) are those who assist infrequently (i.e. 1-2 times a month but less than 12 times per year) at events or activities designed for Children, Youth and/or Vulnerable Adults. CTUMC will provide specific training of CTUMC Safe Sanctuary policy and procedures prior to specific event (such as VBS). CTUMC will use the attendance roster from the training session as confirmation the assistant received the instruction. If the volunteer exceeds the above frequency, volunteers on a regular basis or assumes more of a leadership position within the ministry; he/she will be required to be certified under the expectation for Key Leader.
4. Volunteers interested in working with Children, Youth and/or Vulnerable Adults need to complete an application with the appropriate Staff person. After review of the application, the staff person may give the information to the Local Church Certification Authority who will give the applicant an access code to the on-line certification process which includes video teaching and a national background check. The Local Church Certification Authority will review the results of the background screen and on-line training to determine if Safe Sanctuary certification will be granted.
5. All staff and volunteers will know the location of emergency aid kits and have telephone access for emergency medical assistance.
  - a. Each classroom used for children has a first aid backpack. There is also an emergency pack outside the children's ministry office, in the kitchen and a first aid kit with AED device in the ushers' closet outside the Sanctuary.
  - b. Local access telephone is on the wall in the kitchen and inside the church office. Personal cell phones are encouraged to be carried during events for emergency access.
6. No fewer than two adults will be present at all children and youth events, on or off campus.
  - a. At least one Safe Sanctuary certified adult, 21 years of age or older, will be present at every event with children and/or youth. Assistants should be trained in Safe Sanctuary policies and procedures, but are not required to be "certified" unless they are serving on a regular basis.
  - b. A minimum ratio of 1 adult to 12 children/youth will be maintained in each situation involving the supervision of children and youth. The ratios for nursery will be 1:4 and the ratio for preschool will be 1:8.
  - c. When it is not feasible to have two volunteers in every room, such as when a large group has divided into smaller groups, a hallway floater will be available to check in on groups.
  - d. Assistants will be a minimum of 12 years of age or graduated from 6<sup>th</sup> grade according to the school calendar. In addition, assistants must be at least three years older than the oldest child/youth in the class they are assisting in as a volunteer.
  - e. Key leaders and staff must be at least four years older than the oldest youth involved in the program or event.
  - f. There will be at least two adults of each gender present at co-ed overnight events. At single gender overnight events, at least two or more adults present will be of the same gender as the participating children/youth.
7. Hallway windows and door windows will not be completely covered when classes are in use by children or youth. Decorations on the window are allowed as long as a person can still easily see into the classroom from the hallway.
8. Children/youth attending a church-sponsored event may not leave prior to the ending of that event without previous contact between the parent/guardian and the staff/volunteer in charge.

- a. Children will only be released to persons, other than parent/guardian, if prior approval has been obtained by the staff/volunteer in charge from the parent/guardian.
  - b. Permission forms will be required for each off-campus event involving children and youth.
9. Anyone with a prior conviction of any form of child abuse/neglect or who is a registered sex offender will not be eligible to work with children or youth.
  10. While we seek to create a safe environment for children and youth events/activities, we also seek to be a church who welcomes all persons in need of God's grace and healing love. If we are approached by a person who is a registered sex offender and would like to attend our worship services, we will require the person to sign a covenant acknowledging that they may not be involved with our children/youth activities and that they may not be alone in areas of the building that are used primarily for children and youth activities/events.
  11. Liability insurance coverage: Concord Trinity UMC's Trustees shall maintain liability insurance coverage in conference recommended amounts for events and activities both on and off church property which shall also include specific coverage for sexual misconduct claims.
  12. Waiver of Right to Review - The applicant for Certification must acknowledge his or her understanding that by making an application for certification that they waive any right to inspect or copy any information which the Certification Authority may use to make its determination. The Local Church Certification Authority will only notify the applicant that Certification has been approved or disapproved, and it has no obligation to disclose to the applicant any of its reasons for the decision it makes, nor does the applicant have any right to learn the basis for the decision which the Local Church Certification Authority makes. If the applicant is not willing to acknowledge this policy, then the applicant may not continue with the application process.
  13. Revocation -The Certification Authority reserves the right to revoke an individual's certification at any time. Any reported incident has the potential to cause revocation. Reports of incidents involving the safety, neglect and/or abuse, failure to supervise, and/or to provide for the emotional, psychological, physical, and sexual safety of a child, youth or vulnerable adult may result in revocation of an individual's certification.

### **Training and Screening Reciprocity**

The Safe Sanctuaries Certification Authority may accept training provided by other United Methodist Conferences or United Methodist churches in other conferences after a review of the policies and procedures implemented in the other conference or church.

- An applicant transferring from another United Methodist Church will fill out an application and will receive training on CTUMC specific Safe Sanctuary policies and procedures.
- The Local Church Certification Authority will contact the Local Church Certification Authority from the originating church to receive the background check documentation and proof of certification of the applicant. CTUMC Local Church Certification Authority will also verify the good standing of the applicant.
- Renewal of Safe Sanctuary certification will be required four years from certification date.

## Procedures Specific for Children and Youth

1. Children will attend the appropriate grade/age level equivalent to the grade/age level they attend in school or preschool. Exceptions to this policy on placement will be discussed with the staff person responsible and the decision of the staff person is final.
2. Promotion occurs in mid-August. Children and youth move to the next grade level at this time.
3. Children will be signed in/out of Sunday School classes and other “drop-off” activities for children by parent or guardian. It is recommended that sign-in occur five minutes before the event and that children are picked up within five minutes of the ending time of event or activity. If a child is not picked up within 10 minutes of the close of Sunday School, that child will be signed in to the Nursery until signed out by parent or guardian.
  - a. Preschool through grade 4 may not be released to a sibling less than 18 years of age without written parental permission.
  - b. Children in grades 5-12 may sign themselves in and out of a classroom or event in the presence of a Key Leader or Assistant. The rule may also apply to Fourth Graders with prior written parental permission on file.
4. Children not signed in to a classroom or event are the responsibility of their parents and supervision is up to the parent/guardian. Children should be supervised at all times while on the church property.
5. Parents are encouraged to remain on the property while their children are signed in to CTUMC’s ministries. At times, events are held for parents off-site while childcare is provided for the children at CTUMC. In these cases, a special permission/emergency form will be filled out and on file with the caregivers at CTUMC. Current emergency contact information must be on file for children involved in church-sponsored events/activities.
6. Like other class rolls, the Sunday school sign-in sheets will be logged into church database systems.
7. If a child needs to use the restroom during Sunday School or other activities, the child should use the nearest restroom where a floater or assistant may provide supervision in the common areas such as the hallways.
8. Child/Adult ratios
  - a. Nursery (birth to under 2 years) 4:1
  - b. Preschool (2-not in Kindergarten) 8:1
  - c. Elementary/Youth (K-12) 12:1
9. When car trips off-site are necessary for church-sponsored programs and events involving children fourth grade through youth, one Safe Sanctuary certified volunteer/staff may be present as long as there are two or more fourth grade through youth present. Seat belt use is mandatory at all times.
10. A child or youth should not be alone with a non-related adult during church events/activities except in crisis counseling situations dictating confidentiality. Confidential counseling must take place in a room with windows. The adult with the child/youth in crisis will notify another key leader/staff who is present in the building prior to meeting with the child or youth so that there can

be a visible presence observing the meeting. Ideally, two adults should be present in the room to help the child/youth presenting with a crisis.

11. Other groups renting or using the church building for events or activities involving children/youth should have their own policies for preventing sexual abuse with children and youth. It is the responsibility of the individual or group using the building to both have and follow their policies and procedures for the protection and safety of children involved with their program/activities. (Examples: Boy Scouts, Girl Scouts, Providence School, Volleyball Teams, Dance Groups, etc.)

### **Procedures Specific to Youth**

1. Working with Youth in today's social media culture requires a careful balance of maintaining healthy boundaries with the youth on-line or through texting while also being a presence in their social media worlds to help coach the youth through the challenges and dangers of living in a 24/7 social media frenzy. Staff and Key Leaders may be in the social media networks of the youth with the invitation coming from the youth to the adult. Staff and volunteers should use great care to avoid any social media interaction that may seem inappropriate, suggestive or flirtatious. Adults may respond to crisis outreach from youth at any time. However, non-urgent communication should be respectful of youth curfews.
2. While we do not want staff to meet with youth alone for counseling or other church ministry events/activities based on our policy and procedures, we are also aware that there are rare occasions when staff must use common sense in determining what is in the best interest of the youth and family. For example, if our Student Ministries Director is contacted by a youth to be picked up from a location because the youth's parent is unavailable or incapacitated, the Director may or may not be able to find another adult to travel to pick up the youth at that hour. If a second adult is not available for the car ride, then the staff person should call or text another staff person to let them know of the situation so it is not perceived as secretive. Or if a parent seeks the assistance of an adult volunteer or staff person in giving a youth rides to or from church-sponsored events, the parent should sign a permission form giving that person specific permission to have their youth in the vehicle without additional youth or adults present.

### **Basic Procedures for Responding to Allegations of Abuse**

1. If Staff or Volunteers recognize an incident that may involve inappropriate behavior by staff/volunteers or other participants toward a participant, immediate on-site corrective action should be made.
2. If any person witnesses an instance of abuse or criminal behavior, that person shall immediately report the incident of abuse or suspected abuse to the appropriate church and state authorities. Contact 911 to report the incident to the local police for immediate action and notify the staff person in charge of the event/activity. Incidents may involve the abuse, neglect or exploitation of participants by staff/volunteers or other participants and mandate reporting through the Missouri Child Abuse Hotline (1-800-392-3738) or the Elder Abuse and Neglect hotline (1-800-392-0210). A call to the Hotline is required to be made by staff/volunteers if there is reasonable cause to suspect that abuse of a participant has occurred. When the necessity of reporting occurs, the protection of children, youth, and vulnerable adults must be paramount. Cooperation with the Missouri Children's Division, the Department of Health and Senior Services and law enforcement is required in all such incidents.

3. When an allegation of abuse is made against a staff/volunteer in the church and, especially if the alleged abuser and alleged victim are still on the premises of CTUMC, then the person who receives the reported allegation will:
  - a. Determine if the child/youth sustained injuries requiring first aid, and if necessary, contact emergency medical personnel to manage the child's injuries. Secure the safety of the alleged victim before confronting the person accused of abuse.
  - b. Take the allegation of abuse seriously, but also provide adequate care and respect to both the alleged victim and the alleged perpetrator until the allegation can be substantiated or cleared.
  - c. Notify the parents of the child/youth immediately.
  - d. Call the local police department (911) and report the alleged abuse.
  - e. Call the Missouri Child Abuse Hotline at 1-800-392-3738.
  - f. Notify the Lead Pastor or other key Staff Member and complete the "Report of Suspected Incident of Child Abuse" form documenting in writing all known facts, witnesses and circumstances including the steps taken in the course of handling the allegation of abuse. This report must be given to the Lead Pastor or key Staff Member for appropriate handling with confidentiality.
  - g. If medical attention was necessary, then the "Accident Report Form" must also be completed and given to the Lead pastor or Key Staff person.
  - h. The Pastor will share the completed form with those in a need to know position such as conference authorities, the church's liability insurer and local church attorney to support the investigation of the abuse allegation. The form(s) will be kept in a locked file in the church office.
4. During the investigative process, the alleged abuser should be treated with dignity and support. This person will be immediately relieved of further responsibilities related to church-sponsored programs or ministry involving children, youth or vulnerable adults, as circumstances dictate, until the allegations are cleared or substantiated. Based on the final outcome of the abuse allegation, the person's further involvement in church-sponsored programs involving children, youth, or vulnerable adults will be the decision of the Local Church Certification Authority.
5. The Lead pastor or Key Staff person will be responsible for notifying the appropriate authorities of the annual conference, the church's insurance agent, and the church's attorney. The Lead pastor will also serve as the church's designated media spokesperson, or he/she may appoint another individual to serve as media spokesperson.
6. Only the church's designated media spokesperson will make any necessary statements or responses to the news media. The identities of the alleged victim, his/her parents, and the alleged abuser will be kept confidential.
7. The District Superintendent will be the spokesperson for the district insofar as media inquiries are concerned.
8. The senior pastor or a person designated by the senior pastor will prepare a brief statement about the allegation of abuse to share with the congregation. This statement will inform the congregation that an allegation of child abuse has been made and that church procedures are being followed without giving unnecessary details, placing blame, or revealing the identities of the accused victim, the child's parents or the alleged abuser.