

Safe Sanctuaries Policy
Trinity United Methodist Church

I. Introduction

Trinity United Methodist Church believes that scripture instructs us to care for the children brought into the church. These children may be regular attenders, or they may be the children of guests, grandchildren of our members, or others. Regardless of how these children come to us, we covenant to commit to their protection, and in doing so to represent God's justice and mercy in the world.

II. Definitions

Minor: Anyone under the age of 18

Employee: Any individual paid by the church

Volunteer: Any individual not paid by the church but with leadership responsibilities

Abuse: The sexual contact, physical or emotional harm, or neglect as defined by the relevant statutes of the State of Alabama or other relevant jurisdictions

Leader: An individual who has completed the required training and screening and meets the minimum age requirements as defined in this policy

Student Helper: A volunteer under the age of 18 serving in a non-supervisory role.

Supervisor: An individual qualified as a leader

III. Scope

This policy shall apply to all activities sponsored by Trinity United Methodist Church regardless of location. "Sponsored events" are herein defined to include any event where the church commits resources to the event, including promotional resources except where it is clearly established that the event is sponsored by an outside group.

Additionally, outside groups utilizing the church's facilities shall be required to adhere to this policy or adopt equivalent policies according to a procedure determined by the Board of Trustees.

IV. Policy

As part of our commitment to care for and protect the minors, defined as anyone under the age of 18, as well as the vulnerable adults among us, we commit to the policy defined herein.

Training, Screening, and Selection of Staff and Volunteers

- All documentation collected in association with the application process shall be maintained in a permanent secure file accessible to the Senior Pastor, Executive Director, and others determined by the Staff-Parish Relations Committee.
- All volunteers and paid staff working with minors and vulnerable adults shall complete an application and interview process as determined by the Staff-Parish Relations Committee.
- All volunteers and paid staff working with minors and vulnerable adults shall complete a background check prior to serving or within 90 days of the adoption of this policy.
 - Background checks shall include, at minimum:
 - Social Security trace
 - State of Alabama criminal check
 - National (Multi-Jurisdictional) criminal check
 - National sex offender registry check if not included as part of another check.
 - Background checks shall be valid for not more than 2 years from the date on which the check is completed for volunteers, and paid staff.
 - All volunteers and paid staff working with minors or vulnerable adults shall complete Safe Sanctuaries training offered by the church and led by a certified district trainer prior to serving and to be renewed not less frequently than annually. Additionally, volunteers and staff working with vulnerable adults shall complete additional training on the unique needs of the group(s) with which they are working.
 - Volunteers under the age of 18 are not required to complete a background check, but must receive written permission from a parent or guardian prior to serving.
- Volunteers and paid staff leading groups of minors and vulnerable adults must be at least eighteen (18) years old. Student helpers may be at least twelve (12) years old, but shall not count towards the two-adult or leader-to-child ratios, and must be at least five (5) years older than the oldest member of the group(s) with which they are working.

Supervision of Minors and Vulnerable Adults

- Volunteers and staff working with groups of minors shall be at least 5 years older than the oldest member of the group(s) with which they are working. The Staff-Parish Relations Committee may waive this requirement only in the case of paid staff whose position requires them to regularly lead students less than five (5) years younger provided that they must be at least three (3) years older.
- Volunteers must have been regular attenders in worship for at least six (6) months prior to serving unless this requirement is waived by the appropriate age level ministry director.

- Volunteers and paid staff shall be responsible for no more than ten (10) minors or vulnerable adults at any given time regardless of age.
 - Volunteers and paid staff should be responsible for no more than three (3) minors under the age of 3 years or five (5) minors under the age of seven (7) years.
- At all times where a group of minors is present there shall be two or more non-related and non-cohabitating adults. For purposes of this policy, a married couple or adults that are cohabitating may serve together but shall count as one adult.
- At no time shall windows be obscured or doors locked to areas where minors or vulnerable adults are meeting.

Transportation and Off-Site Events

- Volunteers and staff driving minors and vulnerable adults to off-site events shall be qualified as leaders, and additionally shall complete a motor vehicle record check and provide proof of current insurance coverage.
 - When using charter buses, certification should be provided by the carrier that drivers have completed a recent background check. Additionally, at no time should contracted drivers be alone with minors or vulnerable adults.
 - Any vehicle use requirements adopted by the Board of Trustees shall be followed in addition to this policy.
- Chaperones shall be the same gender as the minors or vulnerable adults being supervised.
- Adults shall not share a bed with any minor including their own child.
- Where possible, hotels opening to an interior hallway should be utilized for overnight events.
- For any off-site event, the trip's leader must obtain medical information and liability release forms for all participants, and provide parents/guardians with a schedule and contact information.

Daycare/Preschool Requirements

In addition to the requirements set forth in this policy, the church's daycare program shall also adhere to relevant requirements established by the State of Alabama. Where the two requirements are in conflict, the more conservative approach should be taken.

Social Media

Being mindful that developing personal relationships with minors is critical to their spiritual formation, volunteers and staff are not prohibited from interacting with minors on social media. However, in such circumstances, the following requirements shall be met:

- The volunteer or staff person shall never initiate a connection (friending, following, etc.) on social media
- If a student initiates a connection, the student's parent or guardian as well as the volunteer or staff member's supervisor shall be notified
- All electronic communications shall be documented and retained

V. Response and Reporting

Mandatory Reporting

While Alabama law does not mandate reporting of observed or suspected abuse in a church setting except for clergy, Trinity United Methodist Church encourages voluntary reporting.

Documentation

All incidents, including incidents, accidents, and suspected abuse shall be documented in writing by staff and volunteers on the appropriate form developed by the Executive Pastor.

Reporting of Observed or Suspected Abuse

In the event that abuse is observed or suspected, the ministry area leader shall report it to the Senior Pastor, who will report it to the Department of Human Resources, local law enforcement, and the district superintendent. In the event that an allegation of abuse is made against the Senior Pastor, the report shall be made to the chairperson of the Staff/Pastor-Parish Relations Committee.

Media Response

In the event that an incident receives media attention, the only persons authorized to speak to the media are the Senior Pastor and District Superintendent. If approached by the media, all others should endeavor to help the media find the authorized spokesperson(s).

VI. Review of Policy

A Safe Sanctuaries Team comprised of representatives of the Staff-Parish Relations Committee, Board of Trustees, and Finance Committee; as well as others whom they invite to participate in the Team's work; shall be responsible for reviewing this policy on an annual basis for adherence to requirements established by the North Alabama Conference and recommending changes to the Administrative Board.

Adopted this 30 day of June, 2020