

**Atlantic United Methodist Church
Safe Sanctuary Policy
Children and Youth**

INTRODUCTION

Our Covenant as God's people at Atlantic United Methodist Church (AUMC) leads us to treat all persons –visitors, congregants, volunteers, and staff--who come through our doors with human dignity and respect. We are committed to providing a safe place to worship, pray, study, witness, minister, be in fellowship, meet, work, conduct business and simply have fun. We are especially committed to helping assure the physical safety, emotional well-being, and spiritual health of the children and youth who attend AUMC. We are also committed to supporting our staff and volunteers who interact with children and youth.

PURPOSE

Our purpose in establishing this Safe Sanctuary Policy and accompanying procedures is to demonstrate our absolute and unwavering commitment to the physical safety and spiritual growth of children and youth, to mitigate risk where abuse can occur and to help ensure volunteers, staff, and clergy who interact with children and youth are protected against unfounded accusations.

STATEMENT OF COVENANT

The Atlantic United Methodist Church pledges to conduct all activities involving children and youth in ways to help assure the safety and spiritual growth of our children and youth. We will be prudent in the selection and recruitment of staff; we will implement appropriate operational procedures in all activities and events; and we will educate our staff and volunteers regarding the implementation of appropriate policies and procedures. We will have a clearly defined procedure for reporting a suspected incident of abuse that conforms to the requirements of the State of Maryland law. We will support our staff and volunteers where accusation(s) are determined to be unfounded.

Definitions

The SAFE TEAM will be comprised of representatives from the Trustees, Children and Youth Ministries and the Staff Parish Relations Committee and the Pastor. The SAFE TEAM will perform an annual review of this policy and ensure the implementation of the policy.

A designated member of the Safe team will annually work to:

- Ensure criminal background clearances are made for all paid staff and volunteers
- Ensure background checks and confidential documentation are scanned into the church's record keeping system and then shredded.

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- Ensure that annual training is provided to include, but not limited to the following subject areas:
 - Safe Sanctuary Policies and Procedures at Atlantic UMC
 - Reporting procedures /What to do when you suspect or discover child abuse
 - Appropriate Interpersonal Boundaries

- Document all aspects of an abuse incident

SAFE SANCTUARY POLICY PROCEDURES

Recruitment and Screening of Volunteers and Staff

AMUC welcomes volunteers to assist with programs for children and youth within our church. Volunteers shall have been in attendance in the congregation for a minimum of six months and be known to members of the church. Persons who are not regularly attending AUMC shall be assigned to work with members or friends of the AUMC congregation.

Background Checks

Criminal Background checks are required of all paid staff, Safe team members and regular volunteers within the ministry of the church that involves work with children and youth. The checks will be conducted after the paid staff or volunteer has signed an authorization for the check to be done. This background check will be repeated automatically every two (2) years. Whether disclosed voluntarily or by result of the security background check, the following items will automatically disqualify a person from participating in the leadership, sponsorship or supervising of any activities or programs with youth / children:

Any conviction for:

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| ➤ Criminal homicide | ➤ Inducing sexual conduct or sexual performance of a child |
| ➤ Aggravated assault | ➤ Possession or promotion of child pornography |
| ➤ Crimes related to the possession, use or sale of drugs or controlled substances | ➤ The sale, distribution or display of harmful material to a minor |
| ➤ Sexual abuse | ➤ Kidnapping or unlawful restraint |
| ➤ Sexual assault (rape) | ➤ Public lewdness or indecent exposure |
| ➤ Aggravated sexual assault | ➤ Enticing a child |
| ➤ Injury to a child | ➤ Indecency with a child |
| ➤ Incest | |
| ➤ Embezzlement | |

If the Safe team representative finds other pertinent information from the background check or voluntary disclosure, (i.e. DWI), the period of time lapsed from conviction to present (for example, 10 years ago), type of pattern of criminal conduct (for example, no other conviction

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since that time) will be reviewed. The decision about this person being accepted as a Safe Sanctuary Partner will be made by the AUMC Safe team.

Records

Safe team records relative to paid staff and volunteers shall be scanned into the church's confidential database system and then shredded.

Training

New paid staff and volunteers that will be working with children and youth shall receive orientation training in the Safe Sanctuaries Policy, in "First Aid" and "CPR". Training will be repeated on an annual basis to all staff and volunteers whose responsibilities include interaction with children and youth. Paid staff and volunteers shall complete and sign a covenant statement acknowledging training and their understanding of the requirements and reporting procedures.

Fire Drills

The Safe team representative shall work to ensure fire drills are performed at least annually.

PROCEDURES FOR THE SUPERVISION OF CHILDREN AND YOUTH WITHIN THE CHURCH

Purpose of Procedures

To provide protection to children and youth from the risk of abuse, and to provide the staff person or volunteer protection from unfounded accusations concerning the abuse of children and youth.

Interpersonal Boundaries

All paid staff and volunteers shall be provided information on "Appropriate Interpersonal Boundaries." These boundaries are to be maintained between adults, children and youth so that they may experience relationships that are healthy physically and spiritually. Adults must role model respectful and nurturing behaviors that do not interfere with another person's privacy. Examples include appropriate: dress, language, and demonstrations of affection.

The Two Adult- Rule

The Safe Sanctuary Policy of AUMC satisfies the "two adult rule" by appointing the second adult as a "roamer" that moves in and out of locations with groups of youth and children. All rooms used for children and youth activities have windows that provide visual contact from public areas. These windows are to be left uncovered so that the roamer can easily view what is going on in the room.

Age of Staff or Volunteers

AUMC will assure that children and youth of the church are under the supervision of a staff person or volunteer that is a least 18 years of age. A teen helper may work with young children

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under the supervision of an adult over the age of 18 years. The teen helper shall not count toward satisfying the Two Adult Rule.

Five Year Rule

Volunteers or staff persons that are not at least five years older than the members of the group with which they are working may participate in the group activity, **BUT** shall not be considered as adult supervisors of the group. There shall be at least two adults that meet the five-year older rule providing supervision for the group. AUMC recognizes the wisdom of including male and female supervisors of children and/or youth participating in activities or events, and shall provide such supervision when possible.

Counseling Sessions

Open-Door Counseling is required when working with children and youth, with a second individual present during the session. All counseling needs, be they for a child, youth, or family member, must be reported to the Pastor. Counseling sessions are limited to two or three sessions maximum, and then referral must be made to a professional with expertise in the specific needs of the individual(s) needing the counseling.

AUMC Sponsored Off-Site Activities

All off-site AUMC sponsored activities must include plans for appropriate equipment and supervision, including but not limited to, transportation considerations, sleeping arrangements if an overnight stay is involved, and Youth Group Websites. The Safe team is to be notified of all off-site activities, with overnight activities presented for review to the team prior to event. Advance notice to parents about off-site events and activities must be provided, and should include details regarding transportation, sleeping arrangements, whether or not a paid staff member or volunteer may be alone with a child, such as on the last leg of a transportation leg. Written and signed parental permission must be obtained prior to any child participating in an off-site church sponsored activity. Health forms for participants must be on file and will be maintained with other Safe team files.

Vehicle Rule

AUMC recognizes that the transporting of children and youth to group events or activities requires specific care to assure safety for all. Parent permission shall be obtained for all events that include travel in private or contract vehicles. When possible, there shall be at least two adults over the age of 18 years and with valid driver's license in vehicles with children and youth. Driver vehicles shall be at least 25 years of age with good driving history.

Photographing Children

AUMC recognizes that parents have the right to control photographing, videotaping or digital record of their children. Permission must be obtained from parent prior to photographing children within the church activities. Specific permission must be obtained to post children's

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pictures on the church website. No identifying information regarding the child shall be including on the Internet.

Use of Bathrooms

During AUMC activities the procedure for use of bathrooms by children and youth will include: children under five will be escorted to the bathroom. A buddy system for children will be practiced.

Inspection of Facilities

The trustees will conduct an annual review of all AUMC facilities accommodating children and youth, including but not limited to Sunday School rooms and doors, age and activity appropriate equipment, first aid kits and fire extinguishers, and 911 postings by all phones.

IMPLEMENTATION OF SAFE SANCTUARIES POLICY AND PROCEDURES

AUMC will provide an annual orientation for paid staff, volunteers and parents regarding Safe Sanctuary procedures and requirements. This orientation should take place at the beginning of the school year and the start of the new Sunday School season. All volunteers must have access to and read the Safe Sanctuaries policy and sign the Participation Covenant as an assurance of compliance.

If an accident occurs with the Sunday School or Youth program, it should be documented in writing and reported to the parents as well as to the Pastor. A review of the accident should be completed with the approved parties, including a representative of the Trustees, to reduce the likelihood of a recurrence. The responsible adult supervising the activity should take charge of the event and the follow-up activities and review.

Serious incidents including those involving fighting, alcohol, drug use or stealing should be reported to the Pastor and documented in writing.

Windows next to classroom doors should be remain uncovered by decorations. If a room does not have a door with a window or a window next to it, the door should remain open at all times.

At no times shall a child be left unattended by a supervising adult while in AUMC building or in proximity if on a field trip. A single youth or child shall not be in a staff member or volunteer's home without another non-relative adult unless the event has been arranged by the parents outside of the program and activities of the church. A children's play-date after school would be an example.

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RESPONDING TO SUSPICIONS OR ALLEGATIONS OF ABUSE

All volunteers and staff working with children and youth of the church shall be given background regarding the regulations and expectations of Maryland for the reporting of abuse to law enforcement and child protective agencies. The obligation to report suspected abuse to the authorities includes both church and non-church activities. When reporting to law enforcement authorities, one is not required to know for certain that a child, youth or disabled adult has been the subject of abuse, only that there is reasonable suspicion. If the report is made in this “good” faith; all states provide immunity from civil and criminal liability for reporting child abuse.

All suspicions of abuse should be reported through Social Service Child Protective Services for the State of Maryland - Worcester County – Telephone – 410-641-0097, after hours 410-632-1111(option #2) Sheriff’s Office – 299 Commerce Street, Snow Hill MD 21863

If a child or youth adult discloses an instance of abuse to a church volunteer or staff member, the adult’s response becomes important to the child or youth’s sense of well-being:

- Maintain a calm response, reassuring that everything will be okay.
- A non-critical response assures that the child, youth or disabled adult will not be getting into trouble.
- Assure the child, youth, or disabled adult is that help will be sought.
- Report the disclosure as required, but maintain the confidentiality of the child, youth or disabled adult.
- All reports of abuse or suspected abuse shall be reported to the Safe team representative and/or pastor.
- A decision will then be made regarding appropriate notification, which may include Child Protective Services, law enforcement, etc. In the case of a minor if the parents are not the subjects of the abuse, they need to be informed as well.
- In the event of an incident/investigation, the Safe team representative will ensure appropriate follow-through.
- If the allegation of the child, youth or disabled adult concerns abuse during a church-related activity, the person who receives the report of abuse shall immediately notify the Pastor, Safe team representative and SPRC Chair. The Safe team Representative is responsible for documenting and completely filling out the appropriate abuse/incident report form and for reporting the incident to the Pastor and SPRC chairperson and authorities.
- If the allegations include the Pastor, the report shall be made directly to the District Superintendent.

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- Within 24 hours the Pastor shall gather the “SAFE TEAM” to review the allegation and shall remain involved through resolution of the allegation.
- The SAFE TEAM will assure that the proper authorities have been notified.
- The SAFE TEAM will assure that the alleged abuser has been removed from contact with the child or youth.
- The SAFE TEAM shall maintain the strictest confidentiality to protect the alleged child or youth victim as well as the members of the Team.
- The SAFE TEAM shall complete the Report of the Suspected Incident of Child Abuse as a record of the actions taken.
- The Pastor shall contact the District Superintendent who will report the alleged incident to the Conference as required by Pen-Del Conference.
- The SAFE TEAM will gather as much information about the incident as possible without interfering with the official investigation of the incident.
- Only the AUMC Pastor, or an officially appointed designee, will be the official spokesperson for providing information either internally to the church, or externally to the media.