

**ST. STEPHEN'S UNITED METHODIST CHURCH
SAFE SANCTUARY POLICY FOR
CHILDREN, YOUTH AND VULNERABLE ADULTS**

Introduction

Jesus said, "Whoever welcomes a child...welcomes me." (Matthew 18:5) He 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 Christian faith calls us to offer both hospitality and protection to those who cannot protect themselves.

In response to this call and action of the 2003 Oklahoma Annual Conference, we hereby commit ourselves as a community of faith to this policy of safety for children, youth and vulnerable adults.

Purpose

Our congregation's purpose for establishing this Safety Policy and accompanying procedures is to demonstrate our absolute and unwavering commitment to create within our ministries a "safe sanctuary" that will foster healthy growth and development in spiritual and other dimensions as we have opportunity to provide ministry.

Statement of Policy

Therefore, as a Christian community of faith and an Oklahoma United Methodist congregation, we pledge to conduct the ministry of the gospel in ways that assure the safety and spiritual growth of all our children, youth and vulnerable adults as well as all those who work with them. It is our policy to:

- A. Follow reasonable safety measures in the selection and recruitment of workers
- B. Implement prudent operational procedures in all programs and events
- C. Conform our facilities to meet reasonable safety standards to reduce risk of harm or injury
- D. Provide workers adequate training regarding the implementation of our policies, procedures and preferred methodologies
- E. Provide adequate supervision and support for workers as they are in ministry on our behalf
- F. Educate parents and others in our congregation as to our policies and procedures
- G. Have in place a clearly defined procedure for reporting and responding to instances of injury, harm or abuse that conforms to requirements of state law
- H. Respond with compassion and integrity to needs as they present themselves following incidents of harm, injury or abuse
- I. Regularly review our policies and procedures to assure that they conform to current legal, health and safety standards

Conclusion

In all our ministries with children, youth and vulnerable adults, this congregation is committed to demonstrating the love of Jesus Christ so that each person is "surrounded by steadfast love...established in faith and confirmed and strengthened in the way that leads to life eternal" (Baptismal Covenant II, United Methodist Hymnal, p. 44).

PROCEDURES FOR THE IMPLEMENTATION OF ST. STEPHEN'S SAFE SANCTUARY POLICY

Effective September 1, 2004

Definitions:

Worker - A person whose ministry includes caring for and working with persons 18 years of age and under and those over 18 years of age who have diminished capabilities.

Vulnerable Adult - Anyone over 18 years of age who has diminished capabilities.

Children - Any child 5th grade and under, unless otherwise stated.

Youth - Any child 6th - 12th grade, unless otherwise stated.

A. Follow reasonable safety measures in the selection and recruitment of workers:

1. All volunteer workers must be active members of St. Stephen's UMC for at least six months prior to taking responsibilities in ministry.
2. Those who do not meet the above criteria may work alongside an approved and trained worker.
3. All volunteer workers will complete Volunteer Application Forms and provide three non-family references to their character and relational skills. This information will be reviewed and updated annually. The Director of Youth Ministries and/or the Director of Children's Ministries will keep these applications in a secured area.
4. All paid staff will complete an application form and provide three non-family references to their character and relational skills.
5. Workers must have a clear criminal record.
 - a. All paid staff and volunteers who have contact with children, youth and vulnerable adults must submit to a background investigation including a sex offender registry check.
 - b. All background investigation results and Oklahoma State Bureau of Investigation reports must be kept separate from personnel files by the Director of Youth Ministries, the Director of Children's Ministries and/or the Chairperson of the Staff-Parish Relations Committee.
6. Young people ages 14 to 18 are welcome to serve as assistants under direct adult supervision with a coordinators permission providing that the young person is at least five years older than the oldest member of the group with whom he or she will work. To assist in the nursery, young people must be at least 15 years of age according to the nursery guidelines.
7. Supervising work areas reserve the right to interview any worker or potential worker with children, youth or vulnerable adults.
8. All information generated in this process shall be maintained in strict confidence.

B. Implement prudent operational procedures in all programs and events:

Ratios:

1. We encourage at least two unrelated adults to be present for all activities, programs and events for children, youth and vulnerable adults. If there are not two adults per classroom, a hall monitor will check with leaders and offer assistance as needed.
2. Leaders are not to be alone or one-on-one with a child, youth or vulnerable adult in an isolated or closed situation.
3. Every effort will be made to provide adequate personnel for supervision of all activities, programs and events for children, youth and vulnerable adults. The ratios recommended below should be maintained if at all possible:
 - 0-12 months 1:4
 - 12-23 months 1:6
 - Twos 1:8
 - Threes 1:12
 - Fours and Fives 1:15
 - Elementary 1:15
 - Youth 1:20

Policies for off site events:

4. When traveling off the premises, the following policies will be adhered to:
 - Parents will be informed of details and will be asked to give permission for children and youth to participate in ministry activities that take place away from the church.
 - Workers will secure written parental consent required for off-site activities.
 - A copy of each child/youth's current Emergency Information and Medical Release form will be kept in the appropriate notebook in the church office.
 - When using the church van, the policies of that vehicle will be followed in addition to the policies stated here.
 - Workers providing transportation in a church owned vehicles or private vehicles, for programs, activities or events for children, youth or vulnerable adults will:
 - Have a valid driver's license
 - Have current insurance
 - Be a minimum of 25 years of age
 - Not have more than two moving violations in the past year
 - Use a vehicle in good mechanical condition
 - Carry no more people than can be secured in seat belts or appropriate restraints and require passengers to wear appropriate restraints
 - Observe all traffic laws
 - Shall be in charge and see that all passengers adhere to the rules
 - Complete forms for transporting others in a private and/or church vehicles
 - When attending off-site activities, youth must always be in groups of three and must check in with an adult worker at least every three hours.
 - When staying overnight, there must be one adult, of the same sex, per sleeping area and only youth of the same sex may be housed together.
 - All coed activities require male and female adult leaders without exception.

Discipline Issues:

5. Workers will inform church staff (in discrete setting) of inappropriate behavior of a youth or child. The staff member will then make any further contacts if needed.
6. Under no circumstance should corporal punishment be used.

Supervision Issues:

7. Workers will insure continuous access and visibility into all classrooms and other rooms where activities take place.
8. Workers will insure that children use the bathroom within the classroom if there is one available. If bathroom assistance is required, a worker shall leave the door slightly ajar.
9. Parents must drop off and pick up children and youth in such a way so that they are not left unsupervised. Workers are not expected to arrive earlier than their designated time or to leave late.
10. Parents (or responsible adult designee) will be required to drop off and pick up children in second grade or younger at the classroom or activity door.
11. Parents are responsible for children and youth who leave the sanctuary during worship except those children going to and from children's church. Parents must accompany children five years of age and younger leaving to use the restroom, etc.
12. Workers will be present before and after the activity for a reasonable period of time or until children and youth are reunited with parent, guardian or other adults charged with such responsibility.
13. Coed overnight activities require male and female adult leaders without exception.
14. Parents must require that children and youth remain in supervised areas.
15. If official childcare is not provided, parents must provide supervision at all times for their children and youth.

Interaction Issues:

16. The following guidelines have been set in order to protect the integrity of the ministry, as well as students and adults who are involved in programs or activities:
 - Any verbal or nonverbal sexual interaction with any youth or child is inappropriate at all times.
 - Much discretion should be used when displaying physical contact with youth and children. Workers should avoid the appearance of impropriety, especially when allowing children on laps, embracing, etc.
 - One-on-one private conversations with a youth or child should take place in a public setting. When a situation arises where you are alone with a youth or child, quickly move that situation to a public setting.
 - Driving alone with a child or youth should be avoided whenever possible. If this must occur, prior parental consent must be obtained.

Nursery Policies:

17. Workers will enforce policies and procedures set forth in the nursery guidelines.
18. Parents must adhere to nursery guidelines.

Other:

19. All outside organizations and groups who use any of our facilities (buildings or property) on a regular basis shall sign that they have a child safety policy in place before being permitted to reserve the facility.
20. Any coordinator, ministry leader or staff person who becomes aware of a violation of the policy will take all necessary steps to ensure future compliance with the policy by all workers. This person will remove any workers from their position if such removal is warranted or if the worker poses a potential threat to others.

C. Conform our facilities to meet reasonable safety standards to reduce risk of harm or injury:

1. Every classroom will have a window providing a view of the interior.
2. St. Stephen's will lock unsupervised areas.
3. Trustees will regularly check facilities for safety hazards.
4. Toxic materials, including cleaning and other supplies, will be stored out of reach of children.
5. Electrical outlets on the lower level preschool and early elementary children's classrooms will be covered when not in use.
6. Playground areas will be checked regularly for dangers.
7. Emergency exit plans are posted in each area of the building. Also posted are instructions for tornado safety. The plans are reviewed regularly with parents, leaders, teachers and caretakers.

D. Provide workers adequate training regarding the implementation of our policies, procedures and preferred methodologies:

1. Workers must attend a training opportunity regarding St. Stephen's policies, procedures and preferred methodologies. A staff member or a ministry director will lead this training.
2. Workers will read St. Stephen's Safe Sanctuary Policy and Procedures. Workers will verify their reading on their volunteer covenant agreement.
3. Annually, there will be opportunities to update and improve knowledge and skills useful in our ministries. Volunteers and paid workers will be required to attend one of these opportunities annually.
4. Training will include, but not be limited to the following:
 - A basic orientation to the facts about child sexual abuse and the church.
 - A description of church policies and procedures governing ministry to children, youth and vulnerable adults. Workers must commit to follow church policies and procedures.
 - Overview of discipline policies including:
 - Workers are never to spank, hit, grab, shake or otherwise physically discipline anyone.
 - Serious disciplinary problems should be reported to a paid staff person who will take appropriate action and contact the parent if needed.
 - Workers completion of all forms including but not limited to volunteer application and a covenant agreement.

E. Provide adequate supervision and support for workers as they are in ministry on our behalf:

1. Leaders and teachers will work in pairs whenever possible. When this is not possible, a designated person will be responsible for occasionally observing an individual at work, checking with them about needs, offering affirmation and suggestions for improvement.
2. Leaders and teachers will know to whom they can go for assistance whenever it is needed.

F. Educate parents and others in our congregation as to our policies and procedures:

1. Policies and procedures pertinent to a specific area will be posted in an easily accessible location (for example, nursery policies will be posted outside the nursery door).
2. All policies and procedures will be accessible to any church member. Copies will be kept in a notebook in the church office, the Director of Youth Ministries' office, and the Director of Children's Ministries' office.
3. From time to time throughout the year, portions of our policies and procedures will be published in our newsletter and/or posted on our website.
4. Each fall, at a parent's orientation, policies and procedures will be reviewed.

G. Have in place a clearly defined procedure for reporting and responding to instances of injury, harm or abuse that conforms to requirements of state law:

Abuse:

1. Suspected abuse of any kind is to be reported immediately to the Department of Human Services hotline (1-800-522-3511) as required by state law.
2. All allegations will be taken seriously and the appropriate actions will be taken. All ministry leaders, employees and volunteers will cooperate fully with any investigation.
3. Any instance of injury requiring a doctor's care, harm, and/or abuse that occurs in the context of any of our ministries with children, youth or vulnerable adults will be reported immediately to the senior pastor and/or the lay leader. Any such instances involving clergy will also be reported to the district superintendent.
4. Any employee who is the subject of an investigation will be removed from his/her position and placed on leave pending completion of an investigation (unless the employee has admitted guilt, in which case he/she will be terminated in accordance with the church policy).
5. Any volunteer worker who is the subject of an investigation will be removed from his/her position pending the completion and outcome of the investigation.
6. Any person who is not found innocent of alleged abuse or molestation will be removed from work with children, youth and vulnerable adults.

Accident and/or injury:

7. In case of an accident or injury, an accident report must be completed.
8. Children, youth or workers who have received an injury, which is obviously minor, should be given simple first aid as needed at the time of injury. No medication either orally or topically should be administered without written consent from the parent in advance. An accident form should be completed and the child or youth's parent or guardian should be notified when the child or youth is picked up.
9. Workers are not to administer any medication (prescription or over the counter) without advance written consent.
10. Any injury that may require medical treatment beyond simple first aid should be given immediate attention. The parent or guardian of the injured person should be immediately notified along with the staff person over the work area.
11. A list of people trained in CPR and First Aid will be posted in each area and will be updated annually.

H. Respond with compassion and integrity to needs as they present themselves following incidents of harm, injury or abuse:

1. When instances of injury, harm or abuse occur, the senior pastor, lay leader or other congregational leaders, as seem appropriate for the situation, will take the lead in determining the need for ministry and will coordinate its implementation.
2. The senior pastor or lay leader, working in concert, will act as official spokespersons for the congregation with the community and the media.

I. Regularly review our policies and procedures to assure that they conform to current legal, health and safety standards:

1. Annually we will conduct a "Safety Audit" to assess adherence to our safety policies and procedures.
2. When the need arises and at least every 2 years, the Safe Sanctuary task force will convene to bring our policies and procedures up to date. This task force should include representation from the Board of Trustees, the Staff-Parish Relations Committee, the Adult, Youth, and Children's Councils, parents of children and youth and workers with children, youth and vulnerable adults and others with knowledge, skills or expertise that will assist the task force in doing its job effectively. The Director of Youth Ministries and the Director of Children's Ministries will be non-voting representatives to the task force.
3. Annually the Board of Trustees will assess our insurance coverage.