

Safe Church Guidelines 3/1/22

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Resources: Safe Sanctuaries (Reducing the Risk of Abuse in the Church for Children and Youth, written by Joy Thornburg Melton), United Methodist Church, Samples of necessary paperwork, Safe Sanctuaries in a Virtual World

Online examples of other Safe Church Policies

Introduction: Form a committee to write guidelines, collect background checks, provide training, interview potential volunteers.

Background checks: Pastor, other staff, music director, volunteers who would serve vulnerable population.

Statement of Purpose: Theological reason for a policy and a statement about the wellbeing of vulnerable population.

Six months' rule: People serving vulnerable population should be members or known to the congregation for at least 6 months.

List all activities in congregation life which serve vulnerable population: Each congregation should write a policy- ask a lawyer to read policy, send a copy to insurance company, always follow the policy after council has approved.

Staff needed for activities: paid church staff and/or volunteers- Two adults present- nursery, day care, Sunday School, VBS, confirmation, youth activities. Floater person during these activities. Activities at other churches- use the same two person guidelines.

Counseling and mentoring: a limited appointment time-located in a place which is open to view.

Activities requiring a driver: Age 21, driving record checked, no issues with drugs/alcohol. Safe car or van. One driver-2 or more minors, one youth alone, driver needs parental permission. Depending on location and length of activity- permission forms, medical releases. Sleeping arrangements, no adults in room with minors, consider gender and orientation needs.

Youth workers: employed staff or volunteers, age 21, do frequent training and supervision, electronic communications, only church related activities, parents receive same message, no individual cell phone calls to minors without parental approval.

Social media posts: policy in place, youth social media, group members only, monitoring of posts, removing, if necessary, age out 18+, adult social media, monitoring, only members, church related activities, both groups, permission required for pictures on website or church bulletin board, no names.

Social Media for rostered ministers: separate email, social media for family and friends, social media with congregations- use the church social media, only post whatever you would say standing in the front of the congregation.

Reporting Abuse: you are likely a mandated reporter, report to CPS about abuse reported by a minor, observed behavior, history of concerns. Your identity will be confidential, communicate with Parish Relations/ Mutual Ministry, council, synod office, insurance company, respect all protection from abuse orders and orders for shared custody. Provide some basic training for recognizing grooming behavior related to child molesters, attach a template of a covenant for sex offenders in the congregation. Monitor the special needs of people with developmental delays and serious mental health issues.

Building access, emergency exists and lavatories for people with disabilities: Identify people willing to help with these needs.

For the future: Make a training video for new staff and volunteers.