



CHRIST UNITED  
CHURCH  
*A Methodist Community*

Safe  
Sanctuaries

December 12

2023

Christ United Church  
**SAFE SANCTUARIES POLICY**  
*Updated December 2023*

**OUR MANDATE**

This policy and its accompanying procedures demonstrate our absolute and unwavering commitment to the physical safety and spiritual growth of all our children, youth, senior citizens, and at-risk adults.

**Definitions of Abuse:**

- Physical abuse – abuse in which a person deliberately and intentionally causes bodily harm to a child.
- Emotional abuse – abuse in which a person exposes a child to spoken and/or unspoken violence or emotional cruelty.
- Neglect – abuse in which a person endangers a child's health, safety, or welfare through negligence.
- Sexual abuse – abuse in which sexual contact between a child and an adult (or another older and more powerful youth) occurs.
- Ritual abuse – abuse in which physical, sexual, or psychological violations of a child are inflicted regularly, intentionally, and in a stylized way by a person or persons responsible for the child's welfare.
- Abuse of vulnerable adults – ritual, emotional, or sexual abuse of any person over 19 years of age with physical, mental and/or developmental disabilities.

**Consequences of abuse:**

- When one child is abused within a church or Christian program, many victims are created, including the child, the congregation, the child's family, and often the family of the abuser.
- The congregation becomes a victim after abuse is revealed and relationships are fractured. It may also suffer for a long time when civil or criminal litigation ensues as a result of the abuse.
- Of foremost importance is the child who has been harmed and for whom care must be provided.

No congregation can afford, either financially, ethically, or morally to fail in implementing strategies for the reduction and prevention of any and every kind of abuse. Therefore, it shall be the policy and covenant of Christ United Church to do everything in our power to prevent physical, emotional or sexual abuse against children, youth, and adults with developmental disabilities involved in any ministry of our local congregations.

Further, we are called to minister to those persons who are experiencing abuse and to those who have been victims of abuse in the past. To that end we covenant to be aware of our legal responsibilities and to comply with those responsibilities and go beyond those responsibilities when necessary to act justly in the best interest of those who have been abused or those who are most vulnerable to abuse.

Careful screening is the best way to reduce the risk of abuse of children, youth and vulnerable adults. It can be time consuming and expensive, but well worth the effort and peace of mind that comes with having the most reliable, committed and experienced staff and volunteers in place for every program that involves children, youth and vulnerable adults.

Although it is our fervent hope and prayer that child sexual abuse does not occur in our programs, we must put into place sufficient mechanisms to reduce the risk of abuse of children, youth, and those who work with them. For that purpose, our ministries shall implement the following procedures in ministry programs and events.

## **STANDARDS, CRITERIA, and RESPONSIBILITIES**

### **Minimum age**

The following standards for authority figures and adult leaders (whether volunteers or staff) are designed to separate authority figures and adult leaders from the group they are serving by age or enough years to reinforce recognition of the authority figure and adult leader's role.

1. Authority figure is a person who is the primary leader of any youth, children, or at-risk or vulnerable adult activity and such person is required to be twenty-one (21) years of age or older. To work with youth (grades six and above) the authority figure must be a minimum of age 21 and it is recommended they are at least four years older than the youth involved.
2. Adults are all persons who have attained the age of majority (19 years in Alabama). To work with youth (grades six and above) the authority figure must be a minimum of age 21 and it is recommended they are at least four years older than the youth involved.
3. Assistants – defined as persons who lend aid to the authority figure or adult leader and act at the direction of the authority figure or adult leader, including volunteers, interns, and camp counselors. Whether working with youth or children, assistants must be:
  - A. A minimum of 12 years of age and four years older than the participants, and
  - B. In the judgment of a staff member, competent to assist in the activity.
  - C. An assistant less than 18 years of age may not be counted as an adult in the child/adult ratios.
  - D. An assistant must lend aid with at least two authority figures present.

### **Two adult rule**

A minimum of two non-related adults are to be utilized in all programming with children, youth, and at risk adults. When it is impossible to staff with two non-related adults, there must be an additional adult serving as a floater with visual and physical access to all areas.

### **Open-door policy**

Classrooms or child care rooms should be open to visitation at any time without prior notice by staff, parents, or other volunteers.

### **Sign-in and Sign-out Procedures**

Sign-in and sign-out procedures should be in place for all ministries for and with children in the church when parents are not expected to be present.

### **Six month rule**

It is highly recommended that a six-month rule be established in the selection of volunteers wishing to give service in the areas of children and youth ministry for non-outreach activities. This means that all volunteers demonstrate an active relationship in good standing in the congregation or campus religious organization for a minimum of six months. Persons not meeting this minimum requirement may serve only in an assistant capacity with two other non-related adults.

### **Adult/Child ratios**

All ratios must be understood in light of first having two adults present at all times. Adults should never be alone with a child or youth. This can include, but is not limited to an automobile while taking a young person home, a classroom with windowless or locked doors, or a cabin at camp.

State codes are required for day care centers and school-based programs and are a strong standard for all programs to follow. This includes Sunday school, mid-week, and summer programs.

**Alabama State Codes for child care ratios:**

- Birth to 18 months – 1 Adult to 5 Children
- 18 months to 2 ½ years of age – 1 Adult to 7 Children
- 24 months to 36 months of age – 1 Adult to 8 Children
- 2 ½ year to 4 years of age – 1 Adult to 11 Children
- 4 years of age to school age – 1 Adult to 18 Children
- School age to 8 years of age – 1 Adult to 21 Children
- 8 years of age and older – 1 Adult to 28 Children

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Note: For more information contact the Alabama Department of Human Resources

**Participants who are physically or mentally impaired:**

- Those needing constant and individual assistance or supervision – 1 leader to 1 participant
- Those needing close, but not constant, assistance or supervision – 1 leader to 2 participants
- Those needing occasional assistance – 1 leader to 4 participants
- Those needing minimal assistance – 1 leader to 5 participants

**Overnight programs:**

Overnight events include summer camps, retreats, mission trips, lock-ins, or any event that extends through the evening. The adults staying with the young people must always be the same gender as the young people. The adults must never share a bed with a young person and should not be alone in the room with a young person at any time.

- Grades 1-3 – 1 adult to 8 young people
- Grades 4-8 – 1 adult to 10 young people
- Grades 9-12 – 1adult to 12 young people

**Motel/hotel settings**

- Students must be placed in single-gender rooms. If rooms adjoin, both rooms should be the same gender.
- Adults of the same gender should be assigned to each room of students, and, where available, placed in adjoining rooms with the adjoining doors propped open at all times.
- In the event that adjoining rooms are unavailable, multiple adults of the same gender will receive the keys to the non-adjoining rooms with instructions to make sure to stop by unannounced to those non adjoining rooms.
- Adults are never to share a bed with a child of whom they are not the parent.

**Transportation**

- All drivers should be screened in the same manner as other leadership for an event including a review of their motor vehicle record.
- When private vehicles are used to transport young people for programmed church-related events, leaders should ensure that appropriate insurance is being maintained by both the church and the private driver.
- All drivers must be 21 years of age or older.
- Where possible, it is recommended that two adults be placed in each vehicle or the vehicles teamed

in minimum groups of two that stay together at all times.

- The safety policies and guidelines for the operation of church-owned vehicles should be strictly followed at all times.
- On all planned trips, a signed, permission slip with medical authorization should be on file. In the absence of such a form, the adult should call a parent or relative to pick up the child.

### **Mentoring**

Mentoring programs or other efforts to pair young people with caring adults are often credited with being the key to a young person's success in life. Therefore, mentoring programs should follow these guidelines:

- Provide basic screening and background checks for all adults who will be working with children and youth.
- Establish clear written guidelines for settings, boundaries, and the environment where the mentoring will occur.
- Providing training for all adults (or youth, if they will be working with children) who are interested in being mentors.
- Make it clear that all persons are expected to follow church guidelines for reducing the risk of abuse.
- Outings should be in public places with routes and time frames agreed upon in advance, and known to all. Outings with several mentors and young people are preferred.
- One-to-one mentoring or tutoring should take place in a group setting, such as one large room rather than individual rooms spread throughout the church building.

### **Non-Licensed Guidance or Meetings**

At any non-licensed meeting or session, where someone is seeking guidance, with children, youth, or adults of the opposite gender, any non-windowed door of the room used should remain open for the entire session. Ideally, the session will be conducted at a time when others are nearby, even if they are not within listening distance. A guidance session should never be held in secret, even if it is requested.

Whenever someone seeks guidance, it is important to determine in the initial meeting if the staff or volunteer is actually capable of addressing the needs effectively. If not, the person should be referred to a professional counselor.

### **Licensed Guidance or Meetings**

Licensed counseling will be pursuant to the conduct expected by the approved licensing body.

### **Interpersonal boundaries**

Adult workers with youth and children must be attentive to:

- Appropriate dress codes
- Appropriate use of language
- Appropriate demonstrations of affection and encouragement.

### **Home visitation**

When visiting a young person in their home as part of a program related activity, the two non-related adult rules still apply. Educating young people of these requirements before they visit is most beneficial.

## **RECRUITING, SCREENING, AND TRAINING**

### **Recruiting and screening volunteer and paid staff**

1. All persons employed or volunteering as an authority figure or adult leader for children/youth shall:
  - a. Complete Application/Commitment Form. (form at end of this policy)
  - b. Provide three character references. References may be contacted on all applicants having access to children, youth and vulnerable adults.
  - c. Be interviewed by the director of the ministry or designated ministry staff.
  - d. Consent to the following background checks:
    - i. Multi-state criminal and sexual offender check based on social security number
    - ii. Motor vehicle records (for those who will be transporting children, youth, or at-risk adults)
    - iii. A background check is valid for two years.
  - e. Have the experience and qualifications for the position.
  - f. Be trained by the church in maintaining the Safe sanctuaries policies within 14 days of employment or beginning of volunteer leadership.
2. All persons employed or volunteering as an assistant for children/youth shall:
  - a. Complete an Application/Commitment Form.
  - b. Be interviewed by the director of the ministry or program.
  - c. Provide character references contacts
  - d. Consent to the following background checks: (if applicable)
    - i. Multi-state criminal and sexual offender check based on social security number
    - ii. Motor vehicle records (for those who will be transporting children, youth or at-risk adults)
  - e. Be trained by the church in maintaining the Safe sanctuaries policies.
3. In the event a substitute worker needs to be brought in under last minute circumstances, that person must:
  - a. Complete an Application/Commitment form.
  - b. Provide a character reference who can be contacted immediately by the director.
  - c. Complete a basic orientation/training provided by the director or other supervisor before working.
  - d. Consent to the following background check:
    - i. Multi-state criminal and sexual offender check based on social security number.
4. A Temporary/Single Event volunteer may be enlisted at the discretion of the responsible Ministry Leader.

## **REPORTING ABUSE**

### **Reporting abuse or alleged abuse in Alabama:**

Alabama's mandatory child abuse and neglect reporting law states that all school teachers and officials, social workers, day care workers or employees, mental health professionals, members of the clergy as defined in Rule 505 of the Alabama Rules of Evidence, or any other person called upon to render aid or medical assistance to any child, when the child is known or suspected to be a victim of child abuse or neglect, shall be required to report, or cause a report to be made of the same, orally, either by telephone or direct communication immediately, followed by a written report, to a duly constituted authority. When an initial report is made to a law enforcement official, the official subsequently shall inform the Department of Human Resources of the report so that the department can carry out its responsibility to provide protective services when deemed appropriate to the respective child or children.

# Adult Volunteer Application

## Christ United Church, Mobile, Alabama

Please complete both sides. Please print clearly. Use additional paper as needed.

Area where you would like to serve: \_\_\_ Children \_\_\_ Middle School \_\_\_ High School

Full Legal Name: \_\_\_\_\_

DOB: \_\_\_\_\_ Age: \_\_\_\_\_

Other Names (e.g., maiden, aliases, nicknames): \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

City, State, Zip \_\_\_\_\_ County: \_\_\_\_\_ Cell: (     ) \_\_\_\_\_

E-Mail: \_\_\_\_\_

Occupation: \_\_\_\_\_ Employer: \_\_\_\_\_

Current Job Responsibilities: \_\_\_\_\_

Previous Volunteer Experience: \_\_\_\_\_

Special Interests, Hobbies, and Skills: \_\_\_\_\_

Would you be willing to use your personal vehicle during/for ministry events?  Yes  No

If yes, do you have a valid driver's license?  Yes  No Do you have liability Insurance?  Yes  No

Why would you like to volunteer with children and/or youth? \_\_\_\_\_

What qualities do you have that would help you work with children and/or youth? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

In your own words, describe your parents' discipline style:

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Describe your own discipline methods:

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Have you ever been charged, convicted of, or pled guilty to a crime, either a misdemeanor or a felony (including but not limited to drug-related charges, child abuse, and other crimes of violence, theft, or motor vehicle violations)?

Yes       No

If yes, please explain fully:

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Would you be available for periodic volunteer training sessions?       Yes       No

Are you currently certified in First Aid?       Yes       No. Year completed: \_\_\_\_\_

Are you currently certified in CPR?       Yes       No. Year completed: \_\_\_\_\_

Do you have a personal relationship with Jesus Christ?       Yes       No

How long have you attended Christ United Church? \_\_\_\_\_

*A ministry supervisor will email you a link to our online background check form submission.*

**Revised 12/12/23- Please list references on the next page...**



**References:** Please list three personal references (people you have known at least 3 years, who are not related to you by blood or marriage) and provide email and phone (if available) information for each. References are confidential. Sample reference questions that may be asked are listed below:

1. What is your relationship to the applicant?
2. How long have you known the applicant?
3. How well do you know the applicant?
4. How would you describe the applicant?
5. How would you describe the applicant's ability to relate to children and/or youth?
6. How would you describe the applicant's ability to relate to adults?
7. How would you describe the applicant's leadership abilities?
8. How would you feel about having the applicant as a worker with your child and/or youth?
9. Do you know of any characteristics that would negatively affect the applicant's ability to work with children and/or youth? If so, please describe.
10. Do you have any knowledge that the applicant has ever been convicted of a crime? If so, please describe.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Email Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Relationship to you: \_\_\_\_\_ Cell phone (i.e., area code): \_\_\_\_\_

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Email Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Relationship to you: \_\_\_\_\_ Cell phone (i.e., area code): \_\_\_\_\_

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Email Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Relationship to you: \_\_\_\_\_ Cell phone (i.e., area code): \_\_\_\_\_

Applicant Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Please return to: **Christ United Church, 6101 Grelot Road, Mobile, Alabama 36609**

**SAFE SANCTUARIES  
NOTICE OF UNFAVORABLE BACKGROUND CHECK**

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Applicant's name: \_\_\_\_\_

Applicant's address: \_\_\_\_\_

As you authorized in your volunteer application, Christ United Church has recently completed a background check as part of our application process. The purpose of this letter is to inform you that there is information in the report we received that, if accurate, would prevent us from allowing you to volunteer, at this time. A copy of this report is enclosed. If, after reviewing the report, (1) you believe that the information contained is inaccurate, and/or (2) you want to know what information in the report falls outside of the acceptable guidelines, we ask that you contact us within five business days. The contact information is included below. Otherwise, we will assume that you no longer wish to pursue volunteerism with us.

Name of organization: \_\_\_\_\_

Contact person: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone number: \_\_\_\_\_

## **SAFE SANCTUARIES SCREENING INTERVIEW**

The following are some suggested questions which may be used in an interview with a potential volunteer:

1. Why are you interested in being associated with our organization?
2. How would you describe yourself?
3. When you read the job description, what appealed to you the most?
4. What specific skills do you bring to this job?
5. With what age group and gender do you prefer to work? Why? Please provide examples of your work with this age group.
6. If you are trained, are you willing to work with other age groups or genders?
7. What kinds of programs or activities would you be willing to lead, supervise, or conduct?
8. If trained, would you be willing to conduct other activities?
9. What do you feel are the chief indicators of a successful program or activity?
10. Give a specific example of how you overcame a difficulty in a job, school, or family.
11. Give an example of how you overcame a problem with a young person other than your own?
12. How were you disciplined as a child? How would/do you discipline now?
13. In what types of activities or recreation do you participate?
14. What were your favorite subjects in school?
15. What would you like to tell us that has not been covered?
16. What questions do you have about our organization or this position?

**SAFE SANCTUARIES  
PARTICIPATION COVENANT**

We are committed to providing a safe and secure environment for all children, youth, at-risk adults, and volunteers who participate in ministries and activities sponsored by our church. The following policy statements reflect our congregation's commitment to preserving this church as a holy place of safety and protection for all who would enter and as a place in which all people can experience the love of God through relationships with others.

- Adults who have been convicted of child abuse of any kind are not allowed to volunteer to work with children or youth in any church-sponsored activity.
- Adult survivors of child abuse need the love and support of our congregation. Any adult survivor who desires to volunteer in some capacity to work with children or youth is encouraged to discuss his or her willingness with one of the church's ministers before accepting an assignment.
- Adult volunteers with children and youth shall observe the "Two-Adult Rule" at all times so that no adult is ever alone with children or youth.
- Adult volunteers with children and youth shall attend training and educational events provided by the church to keep volunteers informed of church policies and state laws regarding child abuse.
- Adult volunteers shall immediately report to their supervisor any behavior that seems abusive or inappropriate.

Please mark each of the statements to which you will commit:

- \_\_\_\_\_ 1. As a volunteer in this congregation, I agree to observe and abide by all church policies regarding working in ministries with children and youth.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 2. As a volunteer in this congregation, I agree to observe the "Two-Adult Rule" at all times.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 3. As a volunteer in this congregation, I agree to participate in training and education events provided by the church related to my volunteer assignment.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 4. As a volunteer in this congregation, I agree to promptly report abusive or inappropriate behavior to the appropriate Ministry Director.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 5. As a volunteer in this congregation, I agree to discuss with a minister of this congregation my experience, if any, as a survivor of child abuse.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 6. As a volunteer in this congregation, I agree to inform a minister of this congregation if I have ever been convicted of child abuse.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 7. After reading this participation covenant, I agree to abide by the policies set forth above.

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Applicant Date: \_\_\_\_\_

**SAFE SANCTUARIES  
MENTOR RELEASE**

I hereby grant permission for my student, \_\_\_\_\_, to participate in mentoring with approved adults, including one-on one mentorship program. I understand that my student will be meeting with his or her mentor one-on-one on a monthly basis. I understand that this parental permission to meet one-on-one is required as it is outside the two adult rule required by Safe Sanctuaries Policies.

Signed:

Parent(s) \_\_\_\_\_ & \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

**SAFE SANCTUARIES  
CHILD ABUSE INCIDENT REPORT FORM**

*To be used by a person who has observed an incident of abuse  
(Please use a computer, type, or print all information.)*

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Date of this report: Submitted to:

**Name of reporter: Signature:**

Contact information:

**Date/Time/Location** of incident:

**Statement of what occurred.** Cite every detail you can remember and use direct quotations wherever possible. CAUTION: Do not question a child for more information than they volunteer. Leave that for trained officials.

Name of child/youth involved:

Age:

Contact information of child/youth:

Parent or guardian:

Contact information of parent or guardian

Name of person accused of abuse:

Relationship of accused to alleged victim:

**On the back of this sheet, list names and contact information of persons who witnessed the incident.  
SAFE SANCTUARIES**

**MINISTRY STAFF REPORT OF SUSPECTED INCIDENT OF CHILD ABUSE**

*(Note: It is imperative that the person filling out this report be familiar with the state law reporting*

*requirements before taking any action or completing this report. Each individual involved in the reporting process should file a complete report to be filed with this summary. Each report should be signed and dated)*

**Staff Name:**

**Signature:**

**Date:**

**Statement of initial report. (Give details: names, dates, locations.)**

**Name of reporter** (paid or volunteer) observing or receiving disclosure of child abuse: (Attach statement of reporter.)

Contact information:

**Alleged Victim's name:**

Alleged Victim's age/date of birth:

Contact information:

**Date/time/location** of incident or initial conversation with victim:

**Name of person accused** of abuse:

Relationship of accused to alleged victim:

Does the accused person hold a position of responsibility in the congregation? Explain:

**Relationship of accused** to alleged victim:

Does the accused person hold a position of responsibility in the congregation? Explain:



**LOG OF INITIAL CONTACTS RESULTING FROM SUSPECTED INCIDENT OF CHILD ABUSE**

*(Note: It is imperative that the person filling out this report be familiar with the state law reporting requirements before taking any action or completing this report. Each individual involved in the reporting process should file a complete report to be filed with this summary. Each report should be signed and dated.)*

**Name of Person Maintaining this log:**

**Report to pastor:**

Person who made the contact:

Date/time:

**Call to local children and family service agency, juvenile judge or law enforcement agency:**

Person who made the contact:

Date/time:

Spoke with:

Summary:

**Contact with victim's parent/guardian (if appropriate):**

Person who made the contact:

Date/time:

Spoke with:

Summary:

**Contact with Lead Pastor: Name:**

Person who made the contact:

Date/time

Spoke with:

Summary:

**Contact with Insurance Provider: Name:**

Person who made the contact:

Date/time:

Summary:

## **SAFE SANCTUARIES CHECKLIST FOR ALLEGED CHILD ABUSE**

### **IMMEDIATELY**

- Familiarize yourself with state reporting laws and other related issues in this document..  
National Clearinghouse on Child Abuse and Neglect Information: <http://nccanch.acf.hhs.gov/>
- Determine whom you will call when you get the report of child abuse. Write the names and telephone numbers somewhere for quick reference. The numbers to have:
  - State Children and Family Service Agency
  - Juvenile judge
  - Law enforcement agency (this is usually not a "911" call)
  - District Superintendent
  - Spokesperson for the Congregation (a legal or public relations professional, or someone designated by the Annual Conference; not the pastor)
  - Insurance Agent
  - Congregational or conference attorney
  - Professional Counselor (not the pastor nor a church staff person)
- Commit to the following action plan:
  - Have a process for reporting child abuse.
  - Enlist/educate key people on staff and in congregation by asking: "In what ways is our church vulnerable to child sexual abuse? Other child abuses?" Consider situations and settings. Ask it in every setting until the whole congregation thinks this way.
  - Implement emergency procedures where needed.
  - Establish Task Force to propose policies and procedures.
  - Continually educate the congregation.
  - Follow and enforce the procedures. No one "slides."
  - Review procedures at least annually.

### **WHEN ABUSE OCCURS**

- Assure child's safety. *The safety of the victim must be the church's primary concern.*
- Notify parents
- Remove accused abuser from further involvement with children or youth. *Treat accused abuser with dignity, not hostility.*
- Notify child protective services or law enforcement agency.
- Notify the Lead Pastort.
- Notify church's insurance agent.
- Notify church's attorney.
- Keep written record of the steps taken by the church in response.
- Work in close communication with designated spokesperson.
- Deal with congregation honestly, concisely, but do not give unnecessary details, place blame, interfere with victim or accused person's privacy, and do not violate any confidentiality concerns.
- Cooperate fully with the investigation conducted by law enforcement or child protective services.
- You may want to see a professional counselor to work through your own feelings.

## **SAFE SANCTUARIES**

### **RESOURCES**

The Book of Discipline of The United Methodist Church – 2016 (The United Methodist Publishing House, 2016).

Safe Sanctuaries: Reducing the Risk of Abuse in Youth Ministries by Joy Melton (Discipleship Resources, 2003).