**Safe Sanctuary Policy**

Covenant United Methodist Church

Lafayette, LA

**Purpose**

Our congregation’s purpose for establishing this Safe Sanctuary Policy and accompanying procedures is to demonstrate our absolute and unwavering commitment to the physical safety and spiritual growth of all who come under our care.

**Statement of Covenant**

Therefore, as a Christian community of faith and a United Methodist congregation, we pledge to conduct the ministry of the gospel in ways that assure the safety and spiritual growth of all of who come under our care. We will follow reasonable safety measures in the selection and recruitment of both staff persons and volunteers; we will implement prudent operational procedures in all programs, ministries and events; we will provide broad education regarding our policies, as well as recognizing the signs of abuse; we will have a clearly defined procedure for reporting a suspected incident of abuse that conforms to the requirements of state law; and we will respond immediately and compassionately to any reported or suspected abuse, again following the requirements of state law and the policies of The Louisiana Conference of the United Methodist Church.

**Requirements for Staff and Volunteers or Who is covered?**

* **Level 1 personnel**—Level 1 personnel at Covenant United Methodist Church include all paid staff, but not limited to: Head Pastor, Associate Pastor, Secretary, Children’s Director, Youth Director, Music Director, Bookkeeper, Custodian, Preschool Director, Preschool Secretary and all Preschool teachers and aids.

Persons at this level are required to:

1. Attend, at least annually, Safe Sanctuary Policy training
2. Undergo a criminal background and reference check
* **Level 2 personnel**—Every volunteer who regularly supervises, or works around children or youth at Covenant United Methodist Church must be at least at Level 2. This includes but is not limited to: all church and preschool volunteers that have direct contact with children and/or youth.

Persons at this level are required to:

1. Attend, at least annually, Safe Sanctuary Policy training
2. Undergo a basic background search using familywatchdog.us
3. If a volunteer, must have been actively involved in the congregation or ministry for a minimum of six months, either in our own church congregation or actively involved in another church family and recommended by former senior pastor.
* **Level 3 personnel**—are volunteers that are used only in emergency or occasional situations (For example: chaperones, drivers, VBS staff, musicians, speakers, etc.) Level 3 personnel have been made aware of the Safe Sanctuary Policy; agree in writing to abide by the policy and to “work” only when Level 1 or 2 personnel are present and supervising. Additionally, Level 3 personnel must be known to, and recommended by a Level 1 or 2 person.

Persons at this level are required to:

1. Sign a Safe Sanctuary Amended Covenant Statement stating that they have received a copy of the Safe Sanctuary policy and will abide by it

**Minimum level of Supervision of our children and youth**

**At our facility**:

* All classes, studies, workshops, fellowship/recreation opportunities, one on one counseling sessions, private meetings or mentoring, etc. with youth or children shall be conducted in a public space or in a space easily observable by others at all times.

Thus:

1. A minimum of two adults (for our policy an adult is anyone 18 years of age and older) where one of the adults is at least a Level 2 personnel, and both adults must be present as long as a child or teen is in a church facility for a church sponsored activity. **This does not include daily preschool operations which are subject to state regulations.**
2. The presence of both male and female adult leadership, one of which is at least a Level 2, is required for all co-ed overnight activities, not just in the church facility but on any sponsored activity of Covenant United Methodist Church.

**While away from our facility and during transportation**:

* Medical information/release forms and permission slips and required for any activity where children and youth are away from Covenant United Methodist Church’s main facilities. Additionally, medical information/release forms and permission slips are recommended for all children and youth involved in activities on or off campus.
* Only Level 1, 2, or 3 personnel are allowed to transport children and youth while on a Covenant United Methodist Church sponsored activity. However, a Level 1 or Level 2 adult personnel must be present during trip—see guidelines that follow about carpooling.
* Every child/teen being transported on a Covenant United Methodist Church sponsored activity must be securely fastened in a seatbelt, whether a church or personal vehicle is being used. At no time shall the number of passengers exceed the number of useable seatbelts.
* Safe driving is expected, including: obeying traffic laws, no cell phone usage by driver, no horseplay in vehicles, and must be a mechanically sound with current inspection sticker, valid driver’s license, and insurance
* **Carpooling Rules**: It will be permissible for one adult to transport youth or children in a vehicle provided the following restrictions:
	1. The presence of more than two youth or children in the vehicle
	2. The vehicle is traveling via caravan with the vehicles staying together and in sight of each other at all times
	3. Having a 3rd party observe and document accurate departure and arrival times
	4. At least one of the adults providing transportation or supervising the trip is a Level 1 or Level 2 personnel
	5. It is recommended that all drivers of vehicles for church or other sponsored events shall be at least 21 years of age or whatever the minimum age requirement of our Casualty Insurance Carrier
* For overnight activities, no youth or child is permitted to sleep in the same room/tent of an adult other than his/her own parent or guardian. *May be adapted if health and safety dictate multiple youth, children, and adults in the same room, provided adequate privacy, supervision, and separation of sexes is maintained.* Leaders should select accommodations that maintain separate male and female bathroom facilities.
* Appropriate attire—Proper and modest clothing for activities, trips, and sleeping facilities will be required.

**Additional Provisions for the Necessity of Adults signing it/out their children for all children’s events**

A sign in/sign out procedure for **all nursery and toddler aged children is required**. This procedure shall include a system ensuring that a child will only be released to an authorized parent or designee. For children participating in our Children’s Worship program during both worship services, the same procedure shall apply. Permission forms should be obtained from parents/legal guardians for all events involving children or youth, at which the parent/guardian is not present. These records should be maintained by the Director of Children’s Ministries, but contact information of the parent should be maintained by the immediate teacher/children’s worker.

1. Forms should not only contain parental consent for their child’s attendance, but also medical information/release, emergency contact information.

**Sharing the Safe Sanctuary Policy with our adults of children or youth**

Covenant United Methodist Church will take necessary steps to ensure a process for educating parents on child safety issues. We will use educational opportunities to teach the parents about:

* Sharing the ministry’s Safe Sanctuary policies
* Educating parents on recognizing, reporting and preventing child abuse

**Extra Provisions of our Policy**

It is the policy of Covenant United Methodist Church that church staff members and/or trained volunteer observers will make unannounced visits to classes, nurseries, events and gatherings held both on and off campus, for the purpose of monitoring compliance with our policies.

In addition to the above guidelines, we require at least a five-year age difference between the primary on-site supervisor and the age of those being supervised at any activity involving children or teens. The five-year difference in ages shall apply between the on-site adult in charge and the age of the oldest person supervised.

Persons being closer in age to those being supervised may be acceptable in assisting the primary on-site supervisor(s). The ratio of those “closer in age than 5 years” to those “meeting the 5 year rule” shall never exceed 3 to 1. Those not meeting the 5 year rule must still comply with all other Level 1 or Level 2 requirements.

**Provision for Photos and Social Networking/Media**

All staff, workers and leaders will maintain an “appropriate use” of any social networking website that they use including, but not limited to, Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, etc.

Photos should only be taken while in a group setting with at least three children in each picture. No photos should ever be taken of children/youth alone. A church designated camera will be available for church sponsored events to take pictures and should be returned to the supervisor of the event when it is over.

**Safe Sanctuary Policy with Ministries involving Adults**

While there is ample concern and precedent to be concerned about the welfare of children and youth, we also need to be concerned about the adults involved in our ministries, congregation and care. Paid staff, Clergy and lay, full and part time, should take precautions to ensure that they do not create situations which place themselves or constituents at risk. This policy shall include the following:

* A statement defining and prohibiting sexual abuse within the ministerial relationship as well as procedures for reducing its risk. For example:
	+ Sexual abuse within the ministerial relationship occurs when a person within a ministerial role of leadership (pastor, educator, counselor, youth leader or other position of leadership) engages in sexual conduct or sexualized behavior with a congregant, client, employee, student, staff member, co-worker, or volunteer. Sexual abuse within the ministerial relationship involves a betrayal of sacred trust, a violation of the ministerial role and exploitation of those who are vulnerable. Similarly, sexual and gender harassment must be understood as an exploitation of a power relationship rather than as an exclusively sexual or gender issue. Such exploitation/abuse is strictly prohibited.
* Procedural policies shall include requiring all one on one meetings between adults on behalf of the church/ministry to be held in a public place where there are others present and observing. This may require open door policies or strategically placed windows that allow both confidentiality and observation.
* A statement defining and prohibiting creating a hostile workplace. For example:
	+ Unlawful harassment is a form of discrimination that violates Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and other federal authority.
* Unwelcome verbal or physical conduct based on race, color, religion, sex (whether or not of a sexual nature and including same-gender harassment and gender identity harassment), national origins, age, disability (mental or physical), sexual orientation, or retaliation constitutes harassment when:
	+ The conduct is sufficiently severe or pervasive to create a hostile work environment; or,
	+ A supervisor’s harassing conduct results in a tangible change in an employee’s employment status or benefits (for example, demotion, termination, failure to promote, etc.)
* Hostile work environment harassment occurs when unwelcome comments or conduct based on sex, race, or other legally protected characteristics unreasonably interferes with an employee’s work performance or creates and intimidating, hostile or offensive work environment. Anyone in the workplace might commit this type of harassment—a management official, co-worker, or non-employee, such as a contractor, vendor or guest. The victim can be anyone affected by the conduct, not just the individual at whom the offensive conduct is directed.
* Examples of actions that may create a sexually hostile environment include:
	+ Leering, i.e. staring in a sexually suggestive manner
	+ Making offensive remarks about looks, clothing, body parts
	+ Touching in a way that may make an employee feel uncomfortable, such as patting, pinching or intentional brushing against another’s body
	+ Telling sexual or lewd jokes, hanging sexual posters, making sexual gestures, etc.
	+ Sending forwarding or soliciting sexually suggestive letters, notes, email or images
* Other activities which may result in hostile environment harassment, but are non-sexual in nature, include:
	+ Use of racially derogatory words, phrases, epithets
	+ Demonstrations of a racial or ethnic nature such as a use of gestures, pictures or drawings which would offend a particular racial or ethnic group
	+ Comments about an individual’s skin color or other racial/ethnic characteristics
	+ Making disparaging remarks about an individual’s gender that are not in a sexual nature
	+ Negative comments about an employee’s religious beliefs (or lack of religious beliefs)
	+ Expressing negative stereotypes regarding an employee’s birthplace or ancestry
	+ Negative comments regarding an employee’s age when referring to employees 40 and over
	+ Derogatory or intimidating references to an employee’s mental or physical impairment
* A hostile workplace environment does not include simple teasing, offhand comments or isolated incidents that are not extremely serious. Rather the conduct must be so objectively offensive as to alter the employment environment of the individual. The conditions of employment are altered only if the harassment culminates in a tangible employment action or is sufficiently severe or pervasive to create a hostile work environment.

A statement defining and prohibiting Sexual/Gender Harassment.

* Sexual harassment is any unwanted sexual advance or demand, either verbal or physical, that is reasonably perceived by the recipient as demeaning, intimidating, or coercive. Sexual harassment includes, but is not limited to:
	+ The creation of a hostile or abusive working environment resulting from discrimination on the basis of gender ( Book of Discipline, par. 1611)
	+ Intimidating or coercive behavior that is harassing in nature against a woman because she is a woman or against a man because he is a man.
* A statement that clearly indicates that harassment of any nature will not be tolerated. Keep in mind that though the language above intimates a working relationship, the prohibitions also apply to any group or gathering held in the purview of a congregation or ministry.
* Policies will include a means of reporting abuse/exploitation for volunteers and staff, including clergy and laity.

**Miscellaneous Provisions**

* Reporting abuse is required.
	+ A ministry’s policy shall include a statement to the effect that “Any suspicious or observed sexual misconduct or other abuse or violation of these policies should be reported immediately to Response Team Task Force through the office of the district superintendent.” (See appendix for a copy of the Louisiana Annual Conference’s policy for reporting.)
	+ A statement shall also be included reflecting the state of Louisiana’s laws regarding the reporting of suspected abuse. (Regardless of whether or not suspected abuse occurred as a result of church/ministry.) See attached Louisiana Children’s Code
* Any non-church related entity utilizing any facilities controlled by a ministry covered under these policies shall include provisions for the sharing/training on these policies with any entity utilizing church/ministry facilities prior to the scheduled event or normal operations.
* It is recognized that some churches operate childcare facilities that come within the purview of the State. Nothing in this policy is meant to conflict with any requirements imposed by the State. It is recommended that Church operated/hosted child care facilities seek state licensure.
* Policies should call for a periodic review (at least every 3 years is recommended) of insurance coverage to assure proper coverage for:
	+ Misconduct
	+ Accidents and Injuries
	+ Liability
	+ Offsite activities and transportation

\*updated 10/7/16