

SAFE SANCTUARIES  
Reducing the Risk of Abuse in the Church

Sandersville United Methodist Church  
Sandersville, Washington County, Georgia

LOCAL CHURCH POLICY  
FOR THE PROTECTION OF CHILDREN, YOUTH, AND VULNERABLE ADULTS

PREAMBLE

When the disciples tried to keep the children away from Jesus, he was quick to respond, “Let the children come to me.” Jesus taught that children were to be included and provided for within the community of faith. Today, the church may be the only place where some children find the unconditional love and care they so desperately need to grow and thrive. As Christians, we must take our responsibilities to our children very seriously. We fail in our responsibilities if we neglect to take adequate precautions against abuse in our churches. It is unlikely that we can completely prevent child abuse in every situation, but it is possible for us to greatly reduce the risk by following a thorough practical policy of prevention. This policy attempts to do just that for local church. It is based on our understanding of the widespread problem of abuse throughout our country.

Every 15 seconds a child is abused or neglected.<sup>1</sup> Often abuse occurs in settings where children or youth should have been able to feel safe—homes, schools, camps, and most sadly the church. In more than three quarters of the reported incidents of child abuse, the victim was related to or acquainted with the abuser.<sup>2</sup>

The purpose of this policy is to protect all children, youth, and vulnerable adults that come to us, to protect both our paid and volunteer staff from potential false allegations of abuse and to limit the extent of legal liability of local church.

This local church will endeavor to monitor updates and recommendations by The United Methodist Church and may modify these procedures.

DEFINITIONS

“**Adult**” means a person over 18 years of age or older.

“**Child**” means any person under the age of 18.

“**Vulnerable adults**” for the purposes of this policy will be adults whose mental or physical condition makes them susceptible to abuse.

“**Children’s activities**” means any activity or program in which children are under supervision of staff persons or volunteers.

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<sup>1</sup> Joy Thornburg Melton, *Safe Sanctuaries: Reducing the Risk of Child Abuse in the Church* (Nashville, TN: Discipleship Resources, 1998).

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

**“Staff person”** means any person employed by the local church or programs using its facilities who is responsible for children’s, youth, or vulnerable adult activities. This person has regular and direct contact with children and must be 21 years or older.

**“Ministry Team Leader”** means any person who supervises a children’s activity. This person has regular and direct contact with children, youth, or vulnerable adults. S/he must be 21 years or older.

**“Volunteer”** means any adult who assists in conducting children’s, youth, or vulnerable adult activities under the supervision of a staff person and/or Ministry Team Leader and who has regular and direct contact with children, youth, or vulnerable adults.

**“Helper”** means anyone who aids in ministry, including a youth ages 14 – 18 under the supervision of a Staff Member, Ministry Team Leader, or Volunteer.

**“Staff person in charge of a children’s (or youth or vulnerable adult) activity”** means the church employee responsible for the conduct of this activity. In the case of non-local church programs operating on church property, the duties of the “staff person in charge of the children’s activity” shall be carried out by the non-local church lead staff or volunteer.

**“We”** means local church.

#### GEORGIA STATE CODE SECTION 19-7-5

19-7-5 Reporting of child abuse; when mandated or authorized; content of report; to whom made; immunity from liability; report based upon privileged communication; penalty for failure to report.

(a) The purpose of this Code section is to provide for the protection of children whose health and welfare are adversely affected and further threatened by the conduct of those responsible for their care and protection. It is intended that the mandatory reporting of such cases will cause the protective services of the state to be brought to bear on the situation in an effort to prevent further abuses, to protect and enhance the welfare of these children, and to preserve family life wherever possible. This Code section shall be liberally construed so as to carry out the purposes thereof.

(b) As used in this Code section, the term:

(1) "Abused" means subjected to child abuse.

(2) "Child" means any person under 18 years of age.

(3) "Child abuse" means:

(A) Physical injury or death inflicted upon a child by a parent or caretaker thereof by other than accidental means; provided, however, physical forms of discipline may be used as long as there is no physical injury to the child;

(B) Neglect or exploitation of a child by a parent or caretaker thereof;

(C) Sexual abuse of a child; or

(D) Sexual exploitation of a child.

However, no child who in good faith is being treated solely by spiritual means through prayer in accordance with the tenets and practices of a recognized church or religious denomination by a duly accredited practitioner thereof shall, for that reason alone, be considered to be an "abused" child.

(3.1) "Sexual abuse" means a person's employing, using, persuading, inducing, enticing, or coercing any minor who is not that person's spouse to engage in any act which involves:

(4) "Sexual exploitation" means conduct by a child's parent or caretaker who allows, permits, encourages, or requires that child to engage in:

(A) Prostitution, as defined in Code Section 16-6-9; or

(B) Sexually explicit conduct for the purpose of producing any visual or print medium depicting such conduct, as defined in Code Section 16-12-100.

(c) (1) The following persons having reasonable cause to believe that a child has been abused shall report or cause reports of that abuse to be made as provided in this Code section:

(A) Physicians licensed to practice medicine, interns, or residents;

(B) Hospital or medical personnel;

(C) Dentists;

(D) Licensed psychologists and persons participating in internships to obtain licensing pursuant to Chapter 39 of Title 43;

(E) Podiatrists;

(F) Registered professional nurses or licensed practical nurses licensed pursuant to Chapter 24 of Title 43;

(G) Professional counselors, social workers, or marriage and family therapists licensed pursuant to Chapter 10A of Title 43;

(H) School teachers;

(I) School administrators;

(J) School guidance counselors, visiting teachers, school social workers, or school psychologists certified pursuant to Chapter 2 of Title 20;

(K) Child welfare agency personnel, as that agency is defined pursuant to Code Section 49-5-12;

(L) Child counseling personnel;

(M) Child service organization personnel, **including church staff, employees, and ministry volunteers**; or

(N) Law enforcement personnel.

(2) If a person is required to report abuse pursuant to this subsection because that person attends to a child pursuant to such person's duties as a member of the staff of a hospital, school, social agency, or similar facility, that person shall notify the person in charge of the facility, or the designated delegate thereof, and the person so notified shall report or cause a report to be made in accordance with this Code section. A staff member who makes a report to the person designated pursuant to this paragraph shall be deemed to have fully complied with this subsection.

(d) Any other person, other than one specified in subsection (c) of this Code section, who has reasonable cause to believe that a child is abused may report or cause reports to be made as provided in this Code section.

- (e) An oral report shall be made as soon as possible by telephone or otherwise and followed by a report in writing, if requested, to a child welfare agency providing protective services, as designated by the Department of Human Resources, or, in the absence of such agency, to an appropriate police authority or district attorney....
- (f) Any person or persons, partnership, firm, corporation, association, hospital, or other entity participating in the making of a report or causing a report to be made to a child welfare agency providing protective services or to an appropriate police authority pursuant to this Code section or any other law or participating in any judicial proceeding or any other proceeding resulting therefrom shall in so doing be immune from any civil or criminal liability that might otherwise be incurred or imposed, provided such participation pursuant to this Code section or any other law is made in good faith. Any person making a report, whether required by this Code section or not, shall be immune from liability as provided in this subsection.
- (h) Any person or official required by subsection (c) of this Code section to report a suspected case of child abuse who knowingly and willfully fails to do so shall be guilty of a misdemeanor.

## SCREENING PROCEDURES

Careful screening is one way to prevent the abuse of children, youth, and vulnerable adults.

1. All Staff, Ministry Team Leaders and volunteers who have regular and direct contact with children, youth, and vulnerable adults shall be required to undergo a National Criminal Background Check, submitting such a request to the Pastor on a form provided by the Washington County Sheriff's Office. This background check will be conducted at the church's expense.
2. The Pastor will submit all completed background check forms to the Washington County Sheriff's Office and will receive the reports. The results of the report will be kept confidential and will be kept in a locked file in the Pastor's Study.
3. In the event that a returned Criminal Background Check indicates an occurrence which may disqualify a Staff Member, Ministry Team Leader, or volunteer from working with children, youth, or vulnerable adults, the Pastor shall make such finding known to the Staff Member, Ministry Team Leader, or volunteer. In the event that such a finding occurs concerning a Staff Member, the Pastor will also make it known to the chair of the Staff-Parish Relations Committee.
4. Non-local church programs shall maintain their own personnel files. The local church reserves the right to obtain an explanation of the non-local church's record-keeping process and, upon written request of the Pastor, to be given copies of documents applicable to programs conducted at the local church.
5. The Staff Member in charge of children's activities, youth activities, or activities with vulnerable adults shall review this policy with Ministry Team Leaders and volunteers prior to service. Staff Members, Ministry Team Leaders, and volunteers will sign a statement indicating they have read and understood this policy and agree to abide by its provisions.

## SUPERVISION

Supervision procedures are designed to reduce the possibility of abuse to the children, youth, or vulnerable adults and to protect staff persons and volunteers from unwarranted accusations.

1. Training is a requirement for all Staff Members, Ministry Team Leader and Volunteers working with children in church children's activities. This training will include a review of this policy. Training may include viewing the "Safe Sanctuaries" DVD, reading the "Safe Sanctuaries" books, participating in a "Safe Sanctuaries" event sponsored by the South Georgia Annual Conference (or another Annual Conference of The United Methodist Church), or participating in a training event sponsored by the local church.
2. The minimum supervisory standards will include the "two-adult rule". The two-adult rule requires that no matter the size of the group, there will always be two unrelated adults present. This may include the presence of an adult "roamer" who moves in and out of rooms.
3. No child will be left unsupervised while attending a local church children's activity.
4. Each room or space where children are being cared for shall have a window in the door or the door shall be left open such as a restroom. All activities should occur in open view.
5. Should the children's, youth, or vulnerable adult activity be an outdoor program or occur in a setting which makes it difficult to comply with this policy, the Staff Member in charge of the activity shall take appropriate measures to make sure that the setting suits the activity and that children, youth, or vulnerable adults are properly supervised.
6. Registration materials for activities in which children are outside of the direct supervision of their parents/guardians shall require signed written permission forms.
7. All participants who can understand a covenant shall sign a participation covenant. This covenant can be in the form of clear, posted or printed rules that are explained to the participants at the outset of the program.
8. No person shall supervise an age group unless s/he is AT LEAST 18 years of age or older and is 5 years older than the children being supervised.
9. In the case of overnight events, no children, youth, or vulnerable adult shall occupy a bed with an adult other than his/her parent. No adult shall be in a room alone with a child, youth, or vulnerable adult.

## REPORTING

- 1. In the case of an allegation of child abuse made against a staff member or volunteer, the safety of the victim is Sandersville United Methodist Church's primary concern. The person who receives the report of the allegation of abuse will place the alleged victim in a secure area, with the supervision of at least two adults not involved in the abuse incident.**

- a.) **The Senior Pastor and the safe sanctuary coordinator will be notified immediately of the abuse allegation. They will make appropriate contact to the victim's non-alleged parent/guardian immediately. The Senior Pastor and the safe sanctuary coordinator will consult the Church Attorney and will be responsible for notifying the appropriate child welfare agency or law-enforcement authorities and the appropriate authorities of the Annual Conference (e.g., the District Superintendent and the Conference Counselor), Sandersville United Methodist Church internal leadership and the Church's insurance carrier as soon as possible and within 24 hours of learning of the abuse allegation. If allegations are made against the Senior Pastor, the chairperson of the Staff-Parish Committee shall be contacted immediately and execute the responsibilities assigned to the Senior Pastor in this policy.**
- b.) **The alleged abuser will be informed of the allegation immediately. The alleged abuser will be treated with dignity, but will immediately be removed from further involvement with children or youth. The alleged abuser will be furnished notice in writing that he/she is to have no further contact with the children/youth at Sandersville United Methodist Church. Any employee of Sandersville United Methodist Church who is the subject of an investigation shall be removed from his/her position, with pay, pending completion of the investigation. Any volunteer worker who is the subject of an investigation shall be removed from his/her position pending completion of the investigation.**
- c.) **The person who receives the allegation of child abuse will complete the "Report of Suspected Incident of Child Abuse" (Form 2) as soon as possible and within 24 hours of receiving the allegation. The completed form will be furnished to the Senior Pastor. If requested, the Senior Pastor will share the completed form with the appropriate child welfare agency or law-enforcement officials. The form will be marked "Confidential" and maintained in a locked file cabinet by the Church Administrator.**
- d.) **The Senior Pastor and Church Attorney will prepare a brief statement about the allegation of abuse to share with the Administrative Board and/or congregation. This statement will inform the Board/congregation that an allegation of child abuse has been made without giving unnecessary details, placing blame, or revealing the identities of the child, the child's parents, or the alleged abuser.**
- e.) **The Senior Pastor will maintain a written record of the steps taken by the church in response. All employees/volunteers involved in the incident will maintain written historical records documenting events and action taken.**
- f.) **The Church Attorney is the designated media spokesperson and will make all necessary statements or responses to the news media only after consulting the Conference Director of Communications.**
- g.) **All church employees and volunteers are to fully cooperate with any investigation conducted by law enforcement officials or child protective services.**

- 2. In the case of an allegation of child abuse made against a child's guardian or a non-employee, the safety of the victim is Sandersville United Methodist Church's primary concern. The person who reports their suspicion of or makes of the allegation of abuse will place the alleged victim in a secure area, with the supervision of at least two adults not involved in the abuse incident.**
  - a.) The Senior Pastor and the safe sanctuary coordinator will be notified immediately of the abuse allegation. They will not make contact with the victim's parent/guardian immediately, if they are involved. The Senior Pastor and the safe sanctuary coordinator will consult the Church Attorney and will be responsible for notifying the appropriate child welfare agency or law-enforcement authorities and the appropriate authorities of the Annual Conference (e.g., the District Superintendent and the Conference Counselor), Sandersville United Methodist Church internal leadership and the Church's insurance carrier as soon as possible and within 24 hours of learning of the abuse allegation. If allegations are made against a member of the Senior Pastor's family, the chairperson of the Staff-Parish Committee shall be contacted immediately and execute the responsibilities assigned to the Senior Pastor in this policy.**
  - b.) The person who makes the allegation of child abuse will complete the "Report of Suspected Incident of Child Abuse" (Form 2) as soon as possible and within 24 hours of receiving the allegation. The completed form will be furnished to the Senior Pastor. If requested, the Senior Pastor will share the completed form with the appropriate child welfare agency or law-enforcement officials. The form will be marked "Confidential" and maintained in a locked file cabinet by the Church Administrator.**
  - c.) The Senior Pastor and Church Attorney will prepare a brief statement about the allegation of abuse to share with the Administrative Board and/or congregation. This statement will inform the Board/congregation that an allegation of child abuse has been made without giving unnecessary details, placing blame, or revealing the identities of the child, the child's parents, or the alleged abuser.**
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  - f.) All church employees and volunteers are to fully cooperate with any investigation conducted by law enforcement officials or child protective services.**

## SCOUTING

Sandersville United Methodist Church, through its United Methodist Men's organization, has been the chartering organization for a Cub Scout Pack for over 50 years. Cub Scout Pack 74 is governed by the policies and procedures established by the Boy Scouts of America, and screening of adult volunteers is conducted according to those procedures. However, Cub Scout Pack 74 may be required by the church to subscribe to additional procedures within this policy. In particular, no Cub Scout or other child present during a Scouting event should be left unsupervised.

## OTHER PROVISIONS

In the event that childcare workers are needed for events (e.g., weddings, programs sponsored by civic groups) other than those sponsored by Sandersville United Methodist Church, the applicant or sponsoring group may arrange to use the childcare workers already employed by Sandersville United Methodist Church, compensating them appropriately. Any childcare workers who are not employed by Sandersville United Methodist Church shall undergo the same screening procedures as any Staff Member, Ministry Team Leader, or volunteer in the church.

The Board of Trustees of Sandersville United Methodist Church is encouraged to make this provision clear in its Building Usage Policy.

## AMENDMENTS

This policy may be amended by the Charge Conference or Church Council of Sandersville United Methodist Church. Staff members and other church leaders are encouraged to remain updated on changes in state and federal law and *The Book of Discipline of The United Methodist Church* and to recommend amendments to this policy to keep it compliance with said laws and *Discipline*.

Adopted by the Church Council of Sandersville United Methodist Church, this eighteenth day of November, 2008.

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Tom Rawlings, Church Council Chair

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Penny Smith, Recording Secretary

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Dr. Joe Buck IV, Pastor



## RECOMMENDATIONS

In order to fulfill the requirements of this policy, the Safe Sanctuaries Committee makes the following recommendation(s):

That the Board of Trustees make every effort to provide windows in the doors of all classrooms where children, youth, and vulnerable adults participate in activities.

## POLICY REVIEW

**The Safe Sanctuaries Policies and Procedures of Sandersville United Methodist Church shall be reviewed annually by the Safe Sanctuaries Coordinator. A report of the review will be submitted to the Staff-Parish Relations Committee at the Annual Charge Conference. Revisions would have to be approved by the Staff-Parish Relations Committee.**

**RETURN TO:  
Sandersville United Methodist Church  
PO BOX 611  
202 West Church Street  
Sandersville, Georgia 31082**

**After reviewing the foregoing Policies and Procedures, please sign, date, detach, and return this portion to indicate that you have read, understood, and accept the Safe Sanctuaries Policies and Procedures of Sandersville United Methodist Church.**

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

City \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_\_\_ Zip \_\_\_\_\_

Phone \_\_\_\_\_

**I have read and understand the Safe Sanctuaries Policies and Procedures of Sandersville United Methodist Church. I agree to abide by those policies and procedures. I have no arrests or convictions for a crime under state or federal law [excluding minor traffic offenses] or expungement of such convictions. I authorize and release any job or church references, which I might provide to Sandersville United Methodist Church, to give the Church any information (including opinions) that they may have regarding my work with children and/or youth.**

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Print Full Name

**Form 1**

**PARTICIPATION COVENANT STATEMENT**

The congregation of Sandersville United Methodist Church is committed to providing a safe and secure environment for all children, youth, and volunteers who participate in ministries and activities sponsored by the 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.

1. No adult who has been convicted of child abuse (either sexual abuse, physical abuse, or emotional abuse) should volunteer to work with children or youth in any church-sponsored activity.
2. 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/her willingness with one of our church's ministers before accepting an assignment.
3. 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.
4. Adult volunteers with children and youth shall attend regular training and educational events provided by the church to keep volunteers informed of church policies and state laws regarding child abuse.
5. Adult volunteers shall immediately report to their supervisor any behavior that seems abusive or inappropriate.

**Please answer each of the following questions:**

1. As a volunteer/employee in this congregation, do you agree to observe and abide by all church policies regarding working in ministries with children and youth?  
 Yes  No
2. As a volunteer/employee in this congregation, do you agree to observe the "Two-Adult Rule" at all times?  
 Yes  No
3. As a volunteer/employee in this congregation, do you agree to participate in training and educational events provided by the church related to your volunteer assignment?  
 Yes  No
4. As a volunteer/employee in this congregation, do you agree to report abusive or inappropriate behavior to your supervisor?  
 Yes  No
5. As a volunteer/employee in this congregation, do you agree to inform a minister of this congregation if you have ever been convicted of child abuse?  
 Yes  No

I have read this **Participation Covenant**, and I agree to observe and abide by the policies set forth above.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Participant

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Print Full Name

**Form 2 REPORT OF SUSPECTED INCIDENT OF CHILD ABUSE**

1. Name of worker (paid or volunteer) observing or receiving disclosure of child abuse:

\_\_\_\_\_

2. Victim's name: \_\_\_\_\_

Victim's Age: \_\_\_\_\_ Victim's Date of Birth: \_\_\_\_\_

3. Date/place of initial conversation with/report from victim: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

4. Victim's statement (give your detailed summary here): \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

5. Name of person accused of abuse: \_\_\_\_\_

Relationship of accused to victim

(paid staff, volunteer, family member, other): \_\_\_\_\_

6. Reported to pastor/staff member: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Time: \_\_\_\_\_ Summary: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

7. Call to local children and family service agency: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_ Time: \_\_\_\_\_ Spoke With: \_\_\_\_\_

Summary: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

8. Call to local law enforcement agency: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_ Time: \_\_\_\_\_ Spoke With: \_\_\_\_\_

Summary: \_\_\_\_\_

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9. Call to local district superintendent: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_ Time: \_\_\_\_\_ Spoke With: \_\_\_\_\_

Summary: \_\_\_\_\_

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10. Call to victim's (non-accused) parent/guardian: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_ Time: \_\_\_\_\_ Spoke With: \_\_\_\_\_

Summary: \_\_\_\_\_

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11. Other contacts: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_ Time: \_\_\_\_\_ Spoke With: \_\_\_\_\_

Summary: \_\_\_\_\_

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\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Print Full Name

