

# Safe Sanctuaries Policy



*Our mission at St. Mark United Methodist Church is to nurture all people toward an abundant life in Christ that overflows in love and service to the world.*

St. Mark United Methodist Church  
7001 Northshore Drive  
Knoxville, TN 37919

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# **St. Mark United Methodist Church**

## **Safe Sanctuaries Policy**

He took a little child and had him stand among them. Taking him in his arms, he said to them, “Whoever welcomes one of these little children in my name welcomes me; and whoever welcomes me does not welcome me but the one who sent me.” (Mark 9:36-37). But if anyone causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, it would be better for him to have a large millstone hung around his neck and to be drowned in the depths of the sea. (Matthew 18: 6). When we, as the body of Christ, welcome children into our church we are called upon by God to make our church a safe place for these children who may be the targets of sexual, physical, psychological or other forms of abuse. We are mandated by the teachings of Christ to protect children and other vulnerable individuals and to ensure that no harm comes to them. Although we may not be able to completely prevent child abuse in every situation, we can develop guidelines and procedures to provide as safe and secure an environment as possible to the children and youth who participate in ministries and activities provided through St. Mark UMC and to greatly reduce the likelihood that a child is ever harmed.

### **BASIC PROCEDURES FOR SAFE MINISTRY WITH CHILDREN AND YOUTH**

#### ***Background Checks***

- A background check will be required on all long-term volunteers (Children’s Worship, Sunday School teachers, Wednesday night youth program volunteers, chaperones for off-site trips, etc.), paid workers and full and part-time staff members who have direct contact with children. The background check must be completed before the individual will be permitted to begin the position. All volunteers will complete a Volunteer Information Form and will be required to give written permission for a background check, including a check for arrest or convictions records, prior to that person assuming the position.
- Individuals who wish to serve as volunteers in children and youth activities must have been a part of St. Mark United Methodist Church for at least six months before they are eligible to participate in these activities.

- No individual will be allowed to serve in any volunteer, paid worker, or staff position if that individual has been previously convicted of, pled guilty or no contest to any crime arising out of any act or conduct involving sexual abuse, or any act or guilty conduct which is of a sexual, molesting, seductive, or criminally deviant nature, whether or not such conduct involved a child. In addition, no individual will be permitted to serve in any volunteer, paid worker or staff position if that individual has had a verdict or judgment rendered against him or her in any civil action arising out of any personal act or conduct related to sexual abuse of a child or an adult with special needs. These prohibitions will strictly apply regardless of the length of time elapsed since the conviction or verdict.
- All groups meeting at St. Mark will be asked to sign the Participation Covenant Statement acknowledging receipt of St. Mark's UMC Safe Sanctuaries Policy. This signed copy will be maintained in the church office. The Director of Smeep (St. Mark Early Education Program) shall be responsible for conducting screens for that program's volunteers, paid workers, and staff. All outside groups not screened by St. Mark UMC shall be responsible for ensuring their staff and volunteers are familiar with the Safe Sanctuaries Policy.
- Every individual who desires to volunteer to work with children/youth at St. Mark UMC must first register for and complete volunteer training. After the training is completed, the prospective volunteer will complete the *Volunteer Information Form* and the *Authorization and Request for Background Information* form necessary to complete the required background check. The *Volunteer Information Form* and *Authorization and Request for Background Information* form along with the volunteer's training certificate will be submitted to the church secretary. The church secretary will obtain a Trak1 background check on the volunteer. If the Trak1 background check reveals no records for the prospective volunteer, then the church secretary will indicate the volunteer is approved and will add the volunteer to the approved volunteer list. A signed copy of the registration will be provided to the Children's Council chairperson, the Sunday School Superintendent, the Children and Youth Director, and Nominations Committee Chair. All paperwork on approved volunteers shall be maintained in a confidential file.
- If the Trak1 background verification reveals any prior or current criminal charges against the prospective volunteer, then the volunteer's entire package including the completed background check will be provided to the minister and Chair of the Church Council who will then determine whether the charge/conviction requires that the prospective volunteer be denied approval. If the infractions revealed on the background check are for minor traffic/vehicle violations resulting in fines of less than \$150.00 then the minister and Church Council Chair will have the discretion to

approve the prospective volunteer. The minister will inform the church secretary of the approval of the volunteer and the church secretary will add the name to the approved volunteer list.

- If the Trak1 background verification reveals a significant infraction (any charge/conviction with fines in excess of \$150.00) then the minister will counsel the prospective volunteer and the minister and Church Council Chair will determine whether it is appropriate to approve the volunteer after such counseling. If the prospective volunteer is approved, the minister will inform the church secretary of the approval and the church secretary will add the name to the approved volunteer list. If after counseling the individual the minister and Church Council Chair determine that the prospective individual is not appropriate to volunteer within the children/youth programs, the minister will deny the volunteer package. Any denied volunteer packages will also be maintained in a confidential file.
- The Holston Conference of The United Methodist Church has suggested Trak1, Oxford Document Management Services, or ChoicePoint as possible agencies/companies to conduct the required background checks. St. Mark UMC has determined to use Trak1 as the church's background check provider. The church will be responsible for the cost of the background checks.

### *Supervision*

- Basic CPR and First Aid training will be made available to all volunteers, paid workers, and staff. Full-time staff members and the Chairperson of the Children's Council shall complete basic CPR and First Aid training.
- Whenever possible, the "two-adult rule" will be implemented requiring that two (2) adults be present during any church-sponsored program, event or ministry. It is preferable that the two adults not be related, however, the church recognizes that there will often be times when having two unrelated adults present for such activities will be impracticable. When it is not possible to have two adults present for any given activity, the church will ensure an adult "floater" is available to visit the room periodically.
- An adult in a leadership role with youth must be 18 years of age or older; must be five (5) years older than the youth with whom he/she is working; and must be 21 years of age or older to operate a motor vehicle with youth as passengers unless an emergency situation arises requiring immediate transportation of the youth.

- No volunteer or worker under the age of 18 will have the sole responsibility for nor be left alone with any children.
- Each room or space where children are being cared for or where activities are being conducted (Sunday School, nursery, youth house, etc.) shall have an eye-level window in the door or the door shall be left open. All activities shall be conducted in open view. A representative from the Trustees and a member of the Safe Sanctuaries Team/Committee shall review the facilities to determine if any changes are needed or required.
- When age appropriate, if an adult is assisting a child in the restroom, the door shall remain partially opened. If there is only one adult in the room where an activity is being conducted and a child requires assistance to go to the restroom, the “floater” will be responsible for assisting the child to the restroom.
- When activities/programs are conducted at the church, two (2) adult staff members or volunteers must remain at the church until all children/youth are picked up by their parents/guardians.
- If an adult provides transportation for children or youth in the adult’s personal vehicle, the “two-adult” rule should be implemented if practicable. An adult should not transport a single child or youth alone but should ensure that another adult or other children/youth are also in the vehicle. The church understands that situations may arise where an adult may have the responsibility of ensuring a child is returned to his or her home after an activity is completed and that the adult may have no option but to transport the child alone. Every effort should be made beforehand to ensure that this occurs only when no other options are available and the adult shall make every effort to notify the child’s parent/guardian and/or the church’s pastor to obtain permission to provide transportation for the child/youth.
- Any adult who provides transportation for children or youth in the adult’s personal vehicle must be aware that the adult’s personal automobile insurance is the primary coverage. Any person who does not have personal automobile insurance shall not be allowed to provide transportation for children or youth. When transporting children, the use of appropriate car seats is required by state law.
- Off-site or mission trips require additional safeguards for children/youth. Adult supervision shall be provided in all situations. The pastor and/or the Director of Children and Youth Ministries shall ensure that the parents or legal guardians of each child or youth provide written permission for their child or youth to participate in off-site or mission trips. Transportation and room assignments will be determined prior to leaving

on trips. Children or youth will room together without an adult. In situations where adults must room with children or youth there must be two adults in the room. These adults must be the same sex as the children/youth in the room. Adults cannot sleep in the same bed with a child or youth unless that adult is the parent/guardian of the child. Boys and girls shall not be allowed to sleep in the same room. Boys and girls may visit each others rooms; however, the doors to these rooms shall remain completely open at all times. Additional rules and regulations may be implemented by the pastor and/or the director of children and youth ministries based upon the specific event/trip being attended.

- Special needs accommodations will be made as needed. Volunteers will consult with family members, parents or guardians to determine specific needs.

### ***Reporting Abuse***

- If an incident of child abuse is alleged, it is crucial that it be dealt with immediately and in a clearly outlined manner. Tennessee law (T.C.A. 37-1-403) requires individuals who work with children under the age of 18 to report any type of suspected child abuse to the proper authorities. If any person suspects child abuse, that person has a legal obligation to report the abuse to the Tennessee Department of Children's Services. The individual cannot fulfill his/her legal obligation by reporting the suspected abuse to any other person within the church relying upon that individual to make the report of harm. Pursuant to T.C.A. 37-1-412, failing to report is a Class A misdemeanor and is punishable by a fine not to exceed two thousand five-hundred dollars (\$2500). Any person who makes such a report in "good faith" is protected by law from any form of liability, but failure to make such a report may give rise to criminal and/or civil liability. A report of suspected abuse can be made anonymously.
- If suspected child abuse has occurred, the individual who suspects child abuse has occurred shall have the responsibility to immediately contact the Tennessee Department of Children's Services Central Intake at 1-877-237-0004. After reporting the suspected abuse, the individual who suspects abuse has occurred shall also report the suspected abuse to the person in charge of the children's activity.
- If immediate danger exists to a child, call 911 immediately and await their arrival or follow their specifics instructions.

- The pastor or the pastor's designee shall be immediately notified as soon as possible. The pastor shall immediately notify the church's attorney, the church's insurance agent, and the District Superintendent.
- The following information should be obtained and reported to the Tennessee Department of Children's Services at the time the referral is made. This information should also be provided to the pastor or the pastor's designee as soon as practicable:
  - (1) Names, ages, addresses and telephone numbers of both the abused and the accused
  - (2) The nature of the alleged abuse, with dates where possible
  - (3) The factual details of the abuse
  - (4) The name of the person making the report and the date that the information was received; however referrals to the Tennessee Department of Children's Services may be made anonymously.
- Any person or persons who are the objects of a report of suspected child abuse shall be required to refrain from all children and youth activities until an administrative decision is reached by the Tennessee Department of Children's Services. In any removal of a person from any children or youth activity, care should be taken to handle this in a discreet manner, recognizing that an investigation is being conducted.
- All allegations of abuse will be taken seriously. In all cases of reported or observed abuse in a children's or youth activity, all staff or volunteers involved in that activity shall be available to and shall fully comply with all official investigating agencies.
- Retaliation against anyone who, in good faith, reports an incident of suspected child abuse will not be tolerated. Any volunteer, paid worker, or staff member who participates in any type of retaliatory actions will be confronted by the Safe Sanctuaries Committee and appropriate action will be taken, which may include termination as a volunteer or employee of St. Mark UMC. Likewise, anyone found to have made a malicious false report of allegations will be confronted by the Safe Sanctuaries Committee and appropriate measures will be taken which may include termination as an employee or volunteer.
- The minister or the minister's designee is the only person(s) authorized to make statements to representatives of the media.
- If the allegations of abuse are made against the pastor, the District Superintendent and the chairperson of the Staff/Parish Relations Committee shall be contacted immediately. The chairperson of the Staff/Parish relations Committee shall act as the minister's designee

until an administrative decision is reached by the Tennessee Department of Children's Services Child Protective Services.

- **Vulnerable adults:** Older persons or persons with disabilities, who are in danger of being mistreated or neglected, are unable to protect themselves, and have no one to assist them. (Tennessee Vulnerable Adult Coalition). If you suspect a vulnerable adult is a victim of abuse, neglect or financial exploitation, please call Adult Protective Services at: 1-888-APS-TENN (1-888-277-8366).
- A Department of Human Services/Adult Protective Services counselor will visit the adult to determine the need for services. Family, friends, or professionals who know the adult's situation may be contacted. The APS counselor will work with the adult victim and others (family, friends, volunteers, and professionals) to assist the adult and reduce the danger. If the adult victim is capable, he/she will be encouraged to make decisions regarding needed care or services. Whenever it is possible, Adult Protective Services staff will assist the adult in remaining in his/her home or community. Some adults may refuse help. Legally, services cannot be forced on an adult, except in special circumstances as specified in the law. Involuntary services always require a court order. Legal action is used only after all other appropriate solutions have been explored. (Information taken from the Tennessee Department of Human Services website [http://tn.gov/humanser/adfam/aps\\_ip.html](http://tn.gov/humanser/adfam/aps_ip.html)).

### ***Review and Revision***

- This policy shall be reviewed by the Safe Sanctuaries Committee and the Children's Council on a biennial basis. Proposed revisions shall be submitted in writing to the chairperson of one of these committees.

**VOLUNTEER INFORMATION FORM**

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Home Phone \_\_\_\_\_ Work Phone \_\_\_\_\_

Cell Phone \_\_\_\_\_ E-Mail \_\_\_\_\_

Mailing address \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Place of employment \_\_\_\_\_

**Please place a check beside each area/activity in which you currently volunteer or in which you wish to be considered for volunteer opportunities:**

\_\_\_\_\_ Children's Worship

\_\_\_\_\_ Children's/Youth Wednesday Night Programs

\_\_\_\_\_ Sunday School (Children/Youth)

\_\_\_\_\_ Chaperone for off-site or overnight activities for children/youth

\_\_\_\_\_ Nursery

\_\_\_\_\_ Children's Choir/Choir Assistant

\_\_\_\_\_ Youth Handbells/ Music

\_\_\_\_\_ Please list any additional areas where you currently volunteer or would like to volunteer

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**Have you read the St. Mark United Methodist Church Safe Sanctuaries Policy?**

YES \_\_\_\_\_ NO \_\_\_\_\_

**Do you agree with all the specifics and agree to apply them in relation to your responsibilities as a volunteer at St. Mark United Methodist Church?**  
YES \_\_\_\_\_ NO \_\_\_\_\_

**Have you been convicted of a crime against children such as neglect or abuse?**  
YES \_\_\_\_\_ NO \_\_\_\_\_

**Will you give St. Mark United Methodist Church authorization to complete a background check which shall include a criminal records check?**  
YES \_\_\_\_\_ NO \_\_\_\_\_

**Will you complete a CPR/First Aid class when offered?**  
YES \_\_\_\_\_ NO \_\_\_\_\_

**Do you have full coverage automobile insurance (comprehensive/liability)?**  
YES \_\_\_\_\_ NO \_\_\_\_\_  
(Please provide a copy of the insurance policy)

**Are you willing to provide transportation for children's and/or youth activities?**  
YES \_\_\_\_\_ NO \_\_\_\_\_

**Do you have a Commercial Driver's License with an Endorsement P (greater than 15 passengers including driver) (CDL-P)?**  
YES \_\_\_\_\_ NO \_\_\_\_\_

**List other places and situations where you have been in ministry:**

**If you have a family, we hope you have discussed serving in ministry with them. If so, what did they have to say?**

**When did you start attending or become a member of St. Mark United Methodist Church?** \_\_\_\_\_

**\*\*\*\*\*I hereby acknowledge that I have read the St. Mark United Methodist Church Safe Sanctuaries Policy and I understand and agree to abide by the policies and guidelines set out in the Policy:**

*Signature* \_\_\_\_\_

*Print name* \_\_\_\_\_

*Date* \_\_\_\_\_

**AUTHORIZATION AND REQUEST  
FOR BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

**St. Mark United Methodist Church has developed a Safe Sanctuaries Policy to provide a safe place for our children and youth to develop and grow in their faith. This Policy includes providing a criminal records check for all volunteers, paid workers and staff who have responsibilities related to the ministries and programs provided for our children and youth. Please provide the following information so that we may complete the necessary investigation. All information will remain confidential and will only be viewed by the pastor and/or the Safe Sanctuaries Committee:**

**Please Clearly PRINT all information:**

**Name** \_\_\_\_\_

**Social Security Number** \_\_\_\_\_ - \_\_\_\_\_ - \_\_\_\_\_ **Sex** \_\_\_\_\_

**Date of Birth** \_\_\_\_\_ **Driver's License Number** \_\_\_\_\_

**State Issuing License** \_\_\_\_\_

**Current Address** \_\_\_\_\_

**City** \_\_\_\_\_ **County** \_\_\_\_\_

**State** \_\_\_\_\_ **Zip** \_\_\_\_\_

**Please list any residences in states other than Tennessee during the past seven (7) years:**

**City:** \_\_\_\_\_ **County** \_\_\_\_\_ **State:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Zip:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Yrs/Mos.** \_\_\_\_\_

**City:** \_\_\_\_\_ **County** \_\_\_\_\_ **State:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Zip:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Yrs/Mos.** \_\_\_\_\_

**City:** \_\_\_\_\_ **County** \_\_\_\_\_ **State:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Zip:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Yrs/Mos.** \_\_\_\_\_

**City:** \_\_\_\_\_ **County** \_\_\_\_\_ **State:** \_\_\_\_\_

Zip: \_\_\_\_\_ Yrs/Mos. \_\_\_\_\_

Have you ever been convicted of a crime (other than minor traffic offense)?

YES \_\_\_\_\_ NO \_\_\_\_\_

If YES, please explain:

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*This information is provided voluntarily and is true and complete to the best of my knowledge. It will be used for identification purposes in verifying information for background verification. I hereby authorize St. Mark United Methodist Church to investigate my background as it pertains to the ministries at St. Mark United Methodist Church. This may include information contained in public records, which could include credit history, criminal records at the county, state, and federal jurisdictional levels and motor vehicle records. I hereby release all persons, companies, or corporations furnishing such information from liability and responsibility.*

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

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

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