



Safe Sanctuaries Policy and Guidelines
Ebenezer United Methodist Church
Oldhams, Virginia

Keeping our children and youth safe
Protecting our leaders and workers

INTRODUCTION

Jesus said, "***Whoever welcomes a child welcomes me. If any of you put a stumbling block before one of these little ones who believe in me, it would be better for you if a great millstone were fastened around your neck and you were drowned in the depth of the sea.***" (Matthew 18:5-6.) Our Christian faith requires us to offer both hospitality and protection to all of our children and youth. We must take every step possible to protect them from economic, physical and sexual exploitation and abuse.

Tragically, churches are not always safe places. Sexual abuse and exploitation occur in both large and small churches as well as in urban and rural areas. The problem cuts across all economic, cultural and racial lines and it appears to be increasing.

Such incidents are devastating to all who are involved: the abused, the family, the local church and its leaders. If just one incident occurs, a church can be torn apart by the emotional, legal and monetary consequences of litigation following allegations of abuse.

God calls us to make our churches safe places, protecting our children and youth from sexual abuse and exploitation and protecting our leaders and workers from false allegations. This policy is designed to make our church a safe and inviting place of worship for all.

Purpose

The purpose of this “**Safe Sanctuaries Policy and Guidelines**” document is to demonstrate our total and unwavering commitment to the physical, emotional and spiritual safety of all of our children and youth.

Covenant Statement

Ebenezer United Methodist Church is committed to conducting the ministry of Jesus Christ while providing physical and emotional safety and spiritual growth for our children and youth. We are also committed to ensuring that our leaders and workers are protected against false allegations. We will follow strict criteria when approving workers and paid staff and we will require that they be trained at least annually on our policies, guidelines and procedures. We will also have a clearly defined process for reporting any suspected or actual abuse. In this document, a child is considered to be 11 years old or under, a youth is considered to be between the ages of 12 and 17 and an adult is considered to be 18 years of age or older.

Requirements for Volunteers and Paid Staff

- At least 18 years old to be supervising children and at least 21 years old to be supervising youth
- At least 5 years older than the oldest child or youth they will be supervising
- A trusted teenager may assist an adult with supervising children
- A member of EUMC for at least three months, unless special approval is given by the Pastor and the Children’s Coordinator, or an active participant in church activities for at least six months. Paid workers recruited for special programs are exempt from these requirements.
- Complete and sign an application giving permission to check references and background information
- Undergo a criminal background check (**Results available only to the applicant, the Pastor and the Children’s Coordinator with all results to be held in strict confidence.**)
- Criminal background checks are to be conducted at least every five years.

NOTE: Individuals who have been convicted of physical or sexual abuse or neglect are not allowed to work in any church-sponsored activity or program for preschoolers, children or youth.

Staff Supervision Guidelines

- At least two adults will be present at all times if possible; otherwise, at least one adult and one trusted teenager
- Workers must have access to and be familiar with a completed personal information card listing emergency contact information, individuals authorized to pick up children, allergies and special diets for each child
- Children will be checked in and out of church sponsored events such as Vacation Bible School and Family Fun Day only by authorized individuals
- If feasible, a child needing assistance to use the restroom should be accompanied by a worker of the same sex, unless the worker is a parent of the child
- Cell phones are permitted by staff but are **only** to be used in the case of emergency. When providing supervision, all focus should be on our children.
- Anyone has the right to observe the children’s classroom at any time unannounced.
- All classroom and office doors will have a window or visibility from the hallway or remain open while occupied.

Transportation Away From the Church

- Drivers must be at least 21 years old to drive others to and from events
- Drivers must go through the same criminal background check as all other staff and must also consent to a check on driving record history
- Checks on driving record history are to be conducted every three years
- Drivers, volunteers and staff must be accessible by phone at all times

Hosting Activities Involving Other Churches

- EUMC's Safe Sanctuaries policies, guidelines and procedures must be followed by the volunteers and staff from other churches who are supervising children
- EUMC will provide copies of this document to volunteers and paid staff from other churches

Actual or Suspected Abuse

- Workers are responsible for ensuring the safety of all children and youth
- The Church Pastor and the Children's Coordinator should be notified immediately of any questionable or inappropriate behavior
- The Pastor and Children's Coordinator will take immediate and appropriate action in the case of suspected or actual abuse
- If the questionable or inappropriate behavior involves either the Pastor or the Children's Coordinator, the Chair of the Pastor Parish Relations Committee should be notified immediately

First Aid and CPR

- An up-to-date first aid kit must be located in each classroom used by children and youth and in the fellowship hall
- A list of everyone in our congregation who is certified in CPR must be posted in each classroom used by children and youth and in the fellowship hall
- All workers and paid staff are encouraged to be certified in first aid and CPR

Training

- Safe Sanctuary Training must be conducted annually in January of each calendar year
- Safe Sanctuary Training must be conducted prior to any new volunteer or paid staff being approved to supervise children

Record Keeping

- Results of criminal background checks and driving records are to be locked in a safe in the Pastor's office with access only by the Pastor and the Children's Coordinator
- A record of dates for completion of criminal background checks and driver records must be maintained and stored in a locked safe in the Pastor's office

This document was approved at a Church Council meeting on February 4, 2019.

Rebecca Rumburg

Pastor

February 4, 2019

Date

TBD

Children's Coordinator

Date