

Safe Sanctuaries Policy
St. Matthew UMC
Greenville, South Carolina

Local church policy for the protection of children, youth and vulnerable adults

Purpose

Our purpose for establishing this Safe Sanctuary policy and accompanying procedures is to demonstrate our commitment to the physical, emotional and spiritual safety of all our children, youth and vulnerable adults.

Covenant Statement

St. Matthew United Methodist Church hereby pledges to conduct the ministry of Jesus Christ in ways that assure the physical and emotional safety and spiritual growth of all our children, youth, and vulnerable adults as well as all our workers with children, youth and vulnerable adults. We will follow reasonable safety measures when selecting and recruiting workers; we will implement appropriate operational procedures in all areas of programming and care; we will train our workers with children, youth and vulnerable adults on our procedures and policies, and we will have a clearly defined procedure for reporting a suspected incident of abuse consistent with South Carolina state law.

Definitions

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

“Supervisory Adult” means a person 21 years of age or older who oversees the event.

“Assisting Adult” means a person 18 years of age or older who is serving to meet the 2-adult rule.

Anyone serving alongside the supervisory adult is considered an assisting adult.

“Helper” means anyone under 18 who aids in ministry and is not counted in the 2-adult rule.

“Child” means any person birth through elementary school age.

“Youth” means any person in middle school or high school. Youth who turn 18 during their senior year of high school will be considered a youth until high school graduation, or the end of that school year, whichever comes first.

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

“Abuse” means a person: (a) inflicts or allows to be inflicted upon the child physical or mental injury or engages in acts or omissions which present a substantial risk of physical or mental injury to the child, (b) commits against a child, or allows to be committed against a child in such person’s care, a sexual offense as defined by the laws of South Carolina or engages in acts or omissions that present a substantial risk that such a sexual offense would be committed against the child, (c) fails to supply the child while in such person’s care with adequate food, clothing, shelter, or supervision appropriate to the child’s age and development, or (d) encourages, condones, or approves the commission of delinquent acts by the child and the commission of the acts are shown to be the result of the encouragement, condonation, or approval.

I. RECRUITMENT AND SELECTION GUIDELINES

A. Age

1. Volunteers and paid staff working with children and youth in primary positions of authority (Supervisory Adult) must be at least 21 years of age and at least 5 years older than the age of the persons they are working to serve. St. Matthew will not use anyone under 21 as a primary position of authority (Supervisory Adult).
2. Volunteers and paid staff working with children and youth and serving as the Second Adult alongside a Supervisory Adult must be at least 18 years of age and at least 5 years older than the age of persons they are working to serve.
3. All volunteers serving as the Supervisory Adult, Second Adult or Assisting adult over 18 must go through the Safe Sanctuary application process.

B. Six-month rule

1. Volunteers must have been an active participant at St. Matthew UMC for at least 6 months.
2. Exceptions may be made for persons transferring in good standing from another congregation. (Only with approval of the Sr. Pastor)

C. Application

Applicants must complete and sign an application and the related waivers giving permission to check references and background information.- permission may also be given by the acceptance of an email invite to training.

D. Background Checks

Criminal background checks shall be made of all clergy, paid staff, and volunteer adults who have supervisory responsibility for children, youth, or vulnerable adults (i.e. youth group leaders)

E. Prior Convictions

Non-approval criteria include, but are not limited to:

1. Felony conviction of any crime against a child, youth, or vulnerable adult.
2. Any individual who has had a DUI in the last five years may not transport children, youth or vulnerable adults.

F. Holy Conversation (Interview)

Applicants may be interviewed for suitability for the work they desire to do. This interview is an opportunity to build relationships within the church.

G. Confidentiality of information

The Office Administrator will keep confidential all information received in the applicant selection process and all confidential records will be kept in a secure area.

The pastor and church staff are responsible for the implementation of these policies as well as the maintenance of confidential records.

H. Recheck

St. Matthew reserves the right to recheck volunteers at any time. All volunteers shall be rechecked for criminal history after 5 years of the initial check.

II. SUPERVISION GUIDELINES

All meetings of children, youth and vulnerable adults affiliated with St. Matthew United Methodist Church will be governed by the following Guidelines:

A. Two Adult Rule

Minimum supervisory standards will include two, Safe Sanctuary approved adults. This applies to classroom activities, activities away from the church facility, and when transporting children, youth and vulnerable adults. Whenever possible, we will strive to have teachers in teams of two or more per Sunday school hour to every class of children, youth or vulnerable adults. An adult “roamer” who moves in and out of several different rooms satisfies the requirement to have two adults present in Sunday school, youth fellowship, and similar classes and activities where several classes are taught simultaneously.

For counseling exceptions see counseling, Section G.

B. Nursery Checkout procedure

All parents utilizing the church nursery will observe the check-in/check-out procedure.

C. Open Door Policy

Protection of children, youth and vulnerable adults requires that an “open door policy” be followed. This policy means that the parents of the children and youth served, the clergy, administrative and professional staff of the church have the right to visit and observe the activity, classroom, or church-sponsored program at any time, unannounced.

D. Outside Access

There must be access to a phone/cell phone when groups are at or away from the church facility. The church office or authorized church representative will be given this number prior to the group’s departure from the church property.

E. Doors and Windows

All classroom and office doors will have a window of visibility from a hallway door. These door windows will be kept free from adornment. There must always be a line of sight into a room from outside the room and line of hearing where possible.

F. Restroom Policy

1. Infant and Toddler

Diapering should be done at the diaper changing tables and near other care providers. For potty-trained children, use the bathroom in the Nursery with visual access.

2. Preschool

An adult leader should accompany preschool children to the restroom, leaving the second adult in the classroom. If only one adult is present, the “roamer” will accompany the child to the restroom, leaving the leader in the classroom. Leave the large outside doors to the bathroom open. Allow the child to enter the stall alone. Wait at the open outside door and help if needed.

3. Younger Elementary (K5-2nd grade)

An adult leader should accompany younger elementary children to the restroom.

This can be the “roamer” or second adult in the classroom. Allow the child to enter the bathroom alone. Wait outside the larger, outside door for the child.

4. Older Elementary (3rd – 5th grade)

Children in older elementary may go to the restroom without an adult leader. Leaders or the “roamer” should watch from their classroom door until the students return to class.

G. Individual counseling

One-on-one interactions are sometimes necessary and appropriate, but care must be taken that they be conducted in an environment that provides visibility. If possible, another adult is to have knowledge of the staff member’s whereabouts and with whom they are meeting. Children and youth receiving individual counseling should be told they are free to discuss any aspects of the counseling process with a parent or other adult. If suspected abuse and neglect are revealed during the session, it will be reported in accordance with section III of this policy. No one should ever be one on one in isolation. See section II A.

Counseling of Youth and Children In instances of youth or child counseling where circumstances dictate that counseling would be most effective on a one-on-one basis, an appropriate church paid staff person may meet individually with a youth with the knowledge and presence of at least one other paid staff member in the building and with a line of sight. At any counseling session with children or youth, the door of the room used should remain open for the entire session, unless there is glass in the door or wall which gives a clear view into the room. If another adult is not in the building when the counseling occurs, the session should be moved to in a public place, such as a restaurant or outside where other people are present.

H. Touch

Physical affections should be appropriate to the age of the child or youth. (For example, it is generally appropriate for a four-year-old to sit in a nursery worker’s lap and give a kiss on the cheek, but it is not appropriate for a teenager and youth leader to behave this way.)

1. Touching should be initiated by the child or youth. It should be a response to the child’s need for comforting, encouragement, or affection. It should not be based upon the adult’s emotional need.
2. Ideally, touching and affection should only be given when in the presence of other children’s ministry or youth workers. It is much less likely that touch will be inappropriate or misconstrued as such when two adult workers are present, and the touching is open to observation. This is especially important when diapering a baby or helping a young child change clothes or use the restroom.
3. Touching behavior should not give even the appearance of wrongdoing. A ministry worker’s behavior must always foster trust ; it should be above reproach.
4. A child’s preference not to be touched should be respected. Affection will not be forced upon a reluctant child.
5. Church workers must promptly discuss inappropriate touching or other questionable behavior by other workers with their ministry leader, staff member or a pastor.

I. Outings Away From Church Property

All children and youth participating in out of town and overnight outings must have

written consent form and a medical release form. (Medical release forms **must be notarized** and are good for a one-year period before having to be renewed) .

1. If the group stays overnight at the church, two or more leaders must be present and must include at least one male and female if the group is mixed gender.
2. If the group leaves the premises, two or more leaders must be present.
3. There must be access to a phone/cell phone when groups are away from the church property.
4. Female staff will supervise female children and youth in their sleeping quarters and male staff will supervise male children and youth in their sleeping quarters.
5. Married couples will not stay together but observe the female/female and male/male sleeping arrangements.
6. Except for a parent/child combination, a staff or volunteer will not occupy the same bed or sleeping bag.
7. No youth shall drive to events. They must drive to the church and then ride with the group. Exceptions to the driving rule will be made with a notarized parent permission letter.

J. Gifts

No staff, either paid or volunteer, are to give gifts to an individual child or youth without the prior knowledge of the parent(s) or responsible clergy. Gifts may not be elaborate but should be modest and appropriate to the occasion.

K. Training

Prior to working in the youth or children department, workers must read, understand, and comply with our Safe Sanctuary Policy. Training should be conducted yearly for our church leadership and on an as needed basis for new volunteers. **CPR?**

L. Verification of Reading of Policy Statement

Upon receipt of this policy statement, the volunteer or paid staff person will read and sign a statement that he/she has read St Matthew United Methodist Church's Safe Sanctuary Policy and will be considered Safe Sanctuary Approved.

III. RESPONSE BY CHURCH WORKERS TO ALLEGATIONS OF ABUSE

As caring Christians, we are committed to protect and advocate for children, youth, and vulnerable adults participating in the life of the church. The church is entrusted to provide an emotionally safe, spiritually grounded, healthy environment for children, youth, and adults in which they are protected from abuse. It is our legal and moral responsibility to report suspected abuse whenever it comes to our attention regardless of where that abuse takes place. We shall report suspected abuse to stop potentially existing abuse and to prevent further abuse. To report abuse is to witness to the world of the love and justice of God. Reporting abuse is a form of ministering to the needs of those crying out for help. If abuse occurs, it is our intention to act as an advocate for all affected persons, providing support, information, assistance and intervention. We seek to provide a supportive atmosphere, offering both objectivity and empathy as we seek to create a climate in which healing can take place.

If abuse is suspected by, observed by or disclosed to a volunteer and/or paid staff member of the church, that person shall report the incident immediately to the pastor or designee. (If the accused is the pastor, see information below.) The following procedure will go into effect:

A. Ensure the protection of and tend to the immediate needs of the child, youth, or vulnerable adult as the situation requires.

B. IMMEDIATELY contact the Senior Pastor and Supervisory Adult, or the adult in charge of the event and call 911 if necessary.

C. The pastor will notify the parents of the victim and take whatever steps are necessary to assure the safety of the child/youth until the parent(s) arrive.

1. It is important to emphasize that the proper authorities must be notified even if the parent(s) does not wish the incident to be reported.
2. If one or both parents is the alleged abuser, the proper authorities will be contacted.

D. The pastor will make sure DSS has been contacted. This is a requirement of the law. (Note: Do not attempt an investigation. This should be left to professionals who are familiar with these cases.) Written documentation will be given to the pastor and/or Chair of the Staff Parish Committee as soon as practically possible.

E. After having reported the suspected abuse to the proper authorities, the pastor will report immediately to the church's attorney, the church's insurance company, and the district superintendent. The district superintendent will report the allegation to the bishop's office.

F. If the accused is working in a volunteer or paid position with children or youth in the church, with dignity and respect for the sacred worth of all persons involved, the accused will be immediately removed from further involvement with children and/or youth.

G. Once the proper authorities have been contacted and the safety of the child or youth is secured, the pastor or other designated person may tell the accused that a report has been made. If the accused is a volunteer or paid staff of the church, that person shall be relieved temporarily of his or her duties until the investigation is finished. If the accused is a paid staff person of the church, arrangements should be made to either maintain or suspend his or her income until the allegations are cleared or substantiated.

H. Any contact with the media should be handled by a pre-determined spokesperson. Care will be taken to safeguard the privacy and confidentiality of all involved. The spokesperson should generally convey that the matter is under investigation and any comments made prior to the conclusion of the investigation would be premature.

I. A written report of the basic information shall be kept ensuring on-going ministry to, and advocacy for, victims and others involved. A form for this

purpose shall be available in the church office. The report shall be brief and contain only information relevant to the situation. It shall be filed in a secure place in order to ensure confidentiality. It shall be written in ink or typed to prevent it from being changed. The church must also file a copy of the report with the bishop's office of the South Carolina Conference where it shall remain confidential.

J. Cards with emergency numbers and contacts will be distributed to all persons working with children, youth, and vulnerable adults.

If the pastor is the accused party:

1. The Supervisory Adult will ensure the protection of and tend to the immediate needs of the child, youth or vulnerable adult as the situation requires.
2. The Supervisory Adult will immediately notify the chair of the Staff Parish Relations Committee (SPRC).
3. The SPRC chair will follow the same procedures as listed in the prior section with the addition of contacting the District Superintendent. The District Superintendent will guide the SPRC chair in how to further carry out responses to the allegations.

IV. CYBER SAFETY POLICY

The internet and portable devices allow people to stay in contact with each other more easily than at any other time in the history of civilization. Some incredible ministry can take place using modern technology, but as with all forms of ministry there are some inherent risks involved with the use of electronic communications. However, following Safe Sanctuary procedures can help to minimize those risks. There is no such thing as privacy in cyberspace. Anything and everything on the internet are public information.

A. Receive Parental/Guardian Permission

In addition to general permission to participate in a St. Matthew ministry, adults working with children and youth will receive advance parental permission in writing for:

1. Posting photos of participants on any official St. Matthew websites or sending them through e-mail or cell phone messages or making videos for any use.
2. E-mailing, Instant messaging, calling, texting, or sending data to a child or youth by computer, PDA, or cell phone.
3. The sharing of any full name or contact information.

B. Guidelines for Communications With Children and Youth

Adults working with children and youth will be instructed to use the following guidelines

1. Email communications will use the "BCC" (blind carbon copy) so that each recipient sees only his or her address when a message is received.
2. Caution will be used when transmitting easily identifiable information like dates, times, locations, or participants.

3. There will be no individual adult to youth conversation. Information will be delivered as a group or parent included.
4. All communications will be conducted in a professional manner.
5. All confidential cyber-communications with children, youth, and vulnerable adults will be saved. Remind 101 will serve as a safe messaging app where information is stored and can be viewed.
6. If at any time an adult feels unsure about a topic addressed, send a BCC to a parent/guardian (if appropriate) or another trusted adult.
7. If abuse is divulged electronically, follow standard reporting procedures.

C. SAFETY MEASURES FOR SHARING PHOTOS ELECTRONICALLY

1. Permission to use photos will be obtained.
2. When posting photos, we will refrain from using names and never use last names or identifiable information
3. When tagging on a social networking site, only tag yourself. Only St. Matthew official adults will be tagged.

D. SAFETY MEASURES FOR USING SOCIAL NETWORKING SITES i.e. Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, etc.

1. Adults will be instructed to set privacy settings to limit viewing of profiles.
2. Adults of St. Mathew UMC in an official capacity will not submit “friend requests” to children or youth.
3. Church leaders and adult volunteers will avoid relationships with children/youth via social networking sites, unless an actual relationship (ministry, family friendship, etc.) already exists between them.
4. Posts to a social networking site are appropriate if it could in theory be attached to someone’s resume or printed in the church bulletin or newsletter.
5. Inappropriate comments, photos, etc. will be removed as quickly as possible.
6. Youth will be encouraged to follow these same guidelines.

E. ADMINISTRATION OF OFFICIAL ST. MATTHEW SOCIAL MEDIA GROUPS

1. Each church relation social media site, group or page will have a minimum of two adult administrators, who are either church leaders or adult volunteers engaged in the ministry
2. Sites will be monitored frequently to allow for quick responses in the event urgent or crisis concerns are posted.
3. Photos should not be of vulnerable/compromising situations and should St. Matthew’s mission.
4. Any inappropriate material posted to a church related social media site, group or page will be deleted and addressed. Refer to “Reporting allegations of abuse” section for further information and reporting guidelines.

F. ONLINE GATHERING POLICIES

1. Continue to apply the two-adult rule. If it is a single user platform, or more than one adult cannot be present at the same time, allow another user to have adult administrative privileges to go in and monitor accounts on a regular basis. This helps meet the “window in a door” or “open door” policies. Have another adult on the youth side of the call who can simply appear and wave, acknowledging that the adult knows the conversation is taking place and can hear

the conversation. A second “safe sanctuary approved adult” can serve as a second adult on the adult’s side of the screen if within hearing and sight of the online conversation.

2. Use platforms that allow for some kind of record to be created. Save chats or texts. Save or record videos. (With permission) Create an activity log for which an adult is logged into an account and using a ministry-based platform (day, time, basic notes about who conversations were with) and keep it current.
3. Maintain the five-year age gap.
4. Plan group chats/online activities when possible. In a one on one Facetime, Zoom, etc., Follow the above policy stated in number 1. Make sure to have parental permission prior to the meeting.
5. Create a basic schedule and communicate that with youth and parents, so that they know when a ministry-based account is being monitored or in use. Anything on that schedule, or that comes from a person logged in to the ministry-based account should be considered as a representative for the church and conversations should follow covenants and guidelines that would be used for in-person gatherings.

St. Matthew United Methodist Church
701 Cleveland Street
Greenville, SC 29601
864-242-1966

Waiver: Communication by Social Media, Photograph and Video, and Texting

- I authorize Staff Members and adults working in an official capacity of St. Matthew United Methodist Church to use photos, videotapes, and or other likenesses of myself and or my child or the child for whom I have legal guardianship for promotional materials regarding St. Matthew United Methodist Church programs, facilities, or services. Such images will not be sold to other parties. Promotional materials bearing these images may be distributed for free to the public and posted on the St. Matthew United Methodist Church website. (www.stmatthewumc.net)
- I authorize Staff Members and adults working in an official capacity of St. Matthew United Methodist Church to communicate by methods of Social Media (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, etc.), email and/or texting with my child or the child for whom I have legal guardianship.
- Do not use photos, videotapes, or other images of myself or my children in promotional material or on the website of St. Matthew United Methodist Church
- Do not communicate by methods of Social Media (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, etc.), email and/or texting with my child or the child for whom I have legal guardianship

Please use one form per family:

Parent/Guardian's Name, printed:

Parent/Guardian's Signature:

Date:

COVENANT FORM

St. Matthew United Methodist Church is committed to providing a safe and secure environment through our Safe Sanctuary Policy for all children, youth and vulnerable adults 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.

GUIDELINES

1. Any adult who has been convicted of child abuse (either sexual, physical, or emotional) should not be allowed to volunteer with children, youth or vulnerable adults 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 our church's pastor before accepting an assignment.
3. All adult volunteers involved with children or youth of our church must have a demonstrated committed relationship to St. Matthew of six month of continuous attendance to the worship service of St. Matthew United Methodist Church.
4. 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.
5. 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.
6. Adult volunteers shall immediately report to their supervisor any behavior that seems abusive or inappropriate.

Please answer the following questions:

1. As a volunteer in this congregation, do you agree to observe and abide by our Safe Sanctuary Policy regarding working in ministries with children, youth and vulnerable adults? ____YES____NO
2. As a volunteer in this congregation do you agree to observe the "Two-Adult Rule" at all times? ____YES____NO
3. As a volunteer in this congregation, do you agree to abide by the six-month rule before beginning a volunteer assignment? ____YES____NO
4. As a volunteer in this congregation, do you agree to participate in training and education events provided by the church related to your volunteer assignment? ____YES____NO
5. As a volunteer in this congregation, do you agree to promptly report abusive or inappropriate behavior to your supervisor? ____YES ____NO
6. As a volunteer in this congregation, do you agree to discuss with the pastor of this congregation your experience, if any, as a survivor of child abuse? ____YES____NO
7. As a volunteer in this congregation, do you agree to inform the pastor of this congregation if you have ever been convicted of child abuse? ____YES____NO

I have read this Covenant, and I agree to observe and abide by the policies set for above and in the Safe Sanctuary Policy.

Signature

Date

Print Full Name

INCIDENT REPORT
(Please print all information.)

DATE OF INCIDENT: _____ TIME OF INCIDENT: _____

LOCATION OF INCIDENT: _____

NAME(S) AND AGE(S) OF CHILD(REN) / YOUTH / VULNERABLE ADULT(S) INVOLVED:

ADDRESS(ES) OF CHILD(REN) / YOUTH / VULNERABLE ADULT(S):

PARENT(S) OR GUARDIAN(S):

NAME(S) OF PERSON(S) WHO WITNESSED THE EVENT:

NAME: _____ PHONE: _____

NAME: _____ PHONE: _____

DESCRIBE EVENT AND ACTIONS TAKEN:

NAME OF ACCUSED:

BY SIGNING THIS FORM, I ATTEST THAT THE INFORMATION GIVEN CONTAINS A TRUE AND ACCURATE ACCOUNT OF THE INCIDENT DESCRIBED AS REPORTED TO ME.

Print Name: _____

SIGNATURE: _____ DATE: _____

This Incident Report given to:

The first Safe Sanctuary Policy of St. Matthew United Methodist Church was approved by the Board of Stewards. The Church Leadership Council (formerly known as the Board of Stewards) has reviewed, revised and found this current policy to be appropriate to safely conduct the ministries of the church.

Lindsay Carrington, Chair of Church Leadership Council

Date

Jim Hopple, Chair of Trustees

Date

Kurt McPherson, Pastor

Date