

Vale & Community of Faith
United Methodist Churches
Safer Sanctuaries Policy and Procedures

Approvals:

Community of Faith UMC

October 22, 2024

Vale UMC

October 10, 2024

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And they were bringing children to Jesus, that He might touch them, and the disciples rebuked them. But when Jesus saw it He was indignant, and said to them, “Let the children come to me, do not hinder them; for to such belongs the kingdom of God. Truly, I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child shall not enter it.” And He took them in his arms and blessed them, laying his hands upon them.

Mark 10:13-16

I. PURPOSE

- A. To establish a safe, caring and secure environment for the children, youth, and any other vulnerable persons in all phases of church life at Community of Faith and Vale United Methodist Churches (hereinafter known as “the churches” or “the church” or “caring community”).
- B. To train and guide the church community, including volunteer workers and staff in providing and supporting a safe, caring and secure environment for children, youth, and any other vulnerable persons in all phases of the church life.

II. BIBLICAL FOUNDATION

- A. The churches seeks to express God’s love of all persons and provide for their personal wholeness. This caring community seeks to provide an environment that is caring and secure in all ways. The church community also seeks to be in ministry to families where abuse may occur. The Bible is the foundation of our understanding upon which all policies, procedures, and ministries must stand.

- B. Jesus teaches us that children have the right and the keys to the Kingdom of God. He demonstrated this through his blessing and nurturing touch. Our goal in response to this Biblical mandate is to maintain a safe, secure and loving place where all persons – especially one who are vulnerable -- are nurtured in ways that enable them to grow physically, emotionally, spiritually and reach their individual potential to become what is God’s will for them. The churches are communities of faith who believe that it is a privilege and an honor to work with children, youth, and vulnerable persons to ensure that those who work with these persons are given every tool necessary to minister appropriately to their needs

III. STATEMENT IN SUPPORT OF LGBTQ+ YOUTH

A. Gender Inclusiveness

1. We affirm the sacred worth of all persons, including those who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, non-binary, or other identities that fall on the LGBTQ+ spectrum. We understand our gender diversity to be a gift from God, intended to add to the rich variety of human experience and perspective. We recognize that persons who identify themselves as LGBTQ+ are first and foremost children of God, and should be afforded all the same opportunities for spiritual formation as non-LGBTQ+ persons. We recognize that this minority group is often the target of specific and systemic forms of discrimination, and only focusing on inherent similarities would miss the fact that LGBTQ+ persons, especially youth, have specific and unique needs.
 - a) Restrooms: Male, female, and single-stall, gender-neutral restrooms will be provided for all church-related activities occurring within the church building.
 - b) Pronouns: We shall endeavor to honor each person’s choice of gendered pronouns.

- c) Confidentiality. We are committed to maintaining the dignity of all persons. We recognize that as a church we are invited into sacred places of trust. We pledge to uphold the highest level of confidentiality possible and will train all staff and volunteers on procedures related to interacting with sensitive information.

IV. RELEVANT STATUTES IN THE STATE OF VIRGINIA

A. Under Virginia law section 63.1-248.2, an abused child is defined as one who is less than eighteen years of age, whose parents or other persons responsible for their care creates or inflicts, or threatens to create or inflict, or allows to be created or inflicted upon such a child a physical or mental injury by other than accidental means, or creates a substantial risk of death or disfigurement, or impairment of bodily or mental functions. This includes the following: failure to provide care necessary for health, abandonment, commits or allows sexual exploitation, endangerment or neglect. Child abuse may be physical, sexual, emotional or mental, and may be the result of actions or omissions to act (e.g., lack of care for a child).

B. Section 63.1-248.3, Virginia Revised Code, states

Any person licensed to practice medicine or any of the healing arts, any hospital resident or intern, any person employed in the nursing profession, any persons employed as a social worker, any probation officer, any teacher or other person employed in a public or private school, kindergarten, or nursery school, any person providing full-time or part-time child care for pay on a regular planned basis, ...and any person associated with or employed by any private organization responsible for the care, custody or control of children who has reason to suspect that a child is abused or neglected, shall report the matter immediately ...to the local department of the county or city wherein the child resides or wherein the abuse or neglect is believed to have occurred or to the Department of Social Services' toll-free child abuse and neglect hotline.

C. In addition, everyone should report any known or reasonably suspected child abuse immediately. Any report to CPS is confidential and the person making the report is

immune from liability for making such a report, unless it is proven that such a person acted in bad faith or with malicious intent.

- D. Leaders should be clear on the limits mandatory reports puts on the discussion of confidentiality to ensure a safe environment for all.

V. DEFINITIONS


- A. Child abuse refers to an act committed by a parent, caregiver or person in a position of trust (even though they may not care for the child on a daily basis) which is not accidental and which harms or threatens to harm a child’s physical or mental health or welfare.
- B. The following definitions and explanations in this section are from the Virginia Department of Social Services.

1. **Mandatory Reporters** include (see IV.B above):

- a) **Paid Staff:** Any pastor, minister, preacher, cleric, nursery worker or employee who is paid.
- b) **Adult Volunteer:** An unpaid person engaged in or involved in church-sponsored activities and who may be entrusted with care and supervision of children or youth.
- c) **Youth Volunteer:** An unpaid person who is in grades 6-12, and engaged in or involved in church-sponsored activities. Youth volunteers will never be given sole responsibility for children or youth.


VI. FORMS OF ABUSE & CHILD ABUSE

- A. **Physical Abuse** - A physical injury, threat of injury or creation of a real and significant danger of substantial risk of death, disfigurement or impairment of bodily functions. Such injury or threat of injury, regardless of intent, is inflicted or allowed to be inflicted by non-accidental means. Examples: asphyxiation, bone fracture; brain damage skull fracture; subdural hematoma; burns, scalding; cuts, bruises, welts, abrasions; internal injuries; poisoning; sprains, dislocations; gunshot, stabbing wounds.

- B. **Physical Neglect** - The failure to provide food, clothing, shelter or supervision for a child if the child's health or safety is endangered. Physical neglect may include multiple occurrences or a one-time critical or severe event that results in a threat to health or safety such as a toddler left alone. Other types of neglect include abandonment, inadequate supervision, inadequate clothing, inadequate food and malnutrition.
- C. **Sexual Abuse** - Sexual abuse includes any act defined in the code of Virginia, which is committed, or allowed to be committed, upon a child by their parent or other persons responsible for the child's care. Examples of such abuse include sexual exploitation, sexual molestation, intercourse/sodomy.
- D. **Medical Neglect** - Refusal or failure by caretaker to obtain and/or follow through with a complete regimen of medical, mental or dental care, which if untreated could result in illness or developmental delays.
- E. **Failure to Thrive** - A syndrome of infancy or early childhood which is characterized by growth failure, signs of severe malnutrition, and variable degrees of developmental retardation. Children are considered to be in this category only when the syndrome is diagnosed by a physician and is caused by non-organic factors.
- F. **Mental Abuse/Neglect** - A pattern of acts or omissions by the caretaker that result in harms to a child's psychological or emotional health or development. This may include demeaning or refuting a person's emotional status.
- G. **Educational Neglect** - The child's caretaker is directly responsible for the failure of the child to attend school or an approved alternative program of study.
- H. **Bizarre Discipline** - Any actions in which the caretaker uses eccentric, irrational or grossly inappropriate procedures or devices to modify the child's behavior.
- I.  **Human Trafficking** - The recruitment, transportation, transfer, harboring or receipt of persons, by means of the threat or use of force or other forms of coercion, of abduction, of fraud, of deception, of the abuse of power or of a position of vulnerability or of the giving or receiving of payments or benefits to achieve the consent of a person having control over another person, for the purpose of exploitation. Exploitation shall include, at a minimum, the exploitation of the prostitution of others or other forms of sexual exploitation, forced labor or services, slavery or practices similar to slavery, servitude or the removal of organs.

1. Suspected human trafficking can be reported to the **national hotline at 1-866-347- 2423**. For a victim to receive help, call **1-888-373-7888**.

VII. DISTINCTIONS BETWEEN PERSONS & ROLES

- A.  **d:** Birth through 5th grade (typically 11 years old).
- B. **Youth:** 6th grade through high school graduation.
- C. **Adult:** Any person aged 20 or older and no longer in high school.
- D. **Staff:** Any person who is employed by the churches, their preschool, or any third party group that utilizes the churches’ grounds and facilities. All church and preschool staff members will be screened and will complete a background check every 3 years, as well as read and agree to abide by this Safer Sanctuaries Policy.
- E. **Volunteer:** Any person who is serving/working on the churches’ grounds or facilities that is not acting in a professional capacity as a fulfillment of their employment. Volunteers will be screened and will complete a background check every 3 years, as well as read and agree to abide by this Safer Sanctuaries Policy.
- F. **Youth Volunteer:** Any volunteer (see definition above) who is between the ages of 12-19 who is acting in a volunteer capacity. Youth Volunteers do NOT count towards the Adult-to-Child Ratio (see “Adult to Child Ratios” for more information).
- G. **Vulnerable Person:** A “vulnerable person” is (a) a child or youth (defined above); or (b) an individual aged 18 years and above who is or may be unable to take care of themselves, or is unable to protect themselves against harm or exploitation by reason of age, illness, trauma or disability, permanently or temporarily, or any other reason.

VIII. REDUCING THE RISK OF CHILD ABUSE

A. In an effort to create the safest possible environment within the churches, several abuse prevention measures will be utilized. These measures include:

1. **Screening** of paid and volunteer workers for past child abuse convictions or expungements.
2. Provision for **regular training** on child abuse issues and policy guidelines to paid staff and volunteer members.
3. Educate the congregation on the Safer Sanctuaries guidelines.
4. **Use of pre-determined adult-to-child ratios.**
5. **Standards** for appropriate classroom discipline and **open classrooms.**
6. **Six-month rule**
 - a) The churches will not place a volunteer in a position to work with the children/youth until they have been a church constituent in good standing for at least six months or furnish on request a letter of recommendation from a qualified outside source (e.g., former pastor or direct supervisor in volunteer situation).

B. Volunteer and Staff Screening

1. Before beginning any service, each employed or volunteer children's teacher, childcare worker, or children/youth worker will be asked to sign a statement indicating that they has never been convicted of child abuse nor had such a conviction expunged unless the expungement was due to false accusations nor is currently the subject of an investigation or under indictment. This screening form will ask for the following information: general information, criminal convictions, prior church membership, prior church volunteer work, prior experience with children/youth and three references that can attest to the applicant's appropriateness for work with children/youth. Anyone who has


had a child abuse conviction or expungement, as well as anyone refusing to sign the statement will not be permitted to work with the children/youth. In addition, applicants for paid staff positions will undergo a criminal record check made through the National Criminal Information Center (NCIC) and clearance by Child Protective Services. The Safer Sanctuaries Committee must approve all paid staff and volunteers who work with the children/youth.

2. Church sponsored and/or supported groups (e.g., Scouts) will be subject to their regulations and policies regarding screening of volunteers and supervision of children and youth. Such groups will be required to submit their policy in writing to the appropriate church staff who will determine whether the policy is consistent with this policy and other pertinent procedures.

C. Staff & Volunteer Training

1. Before beginning their service and thereafter on a yearly basis, all paid and volunteer leaders, child care workers, children and youth Sunday School teachers, Vacation Bible School workers and all other child/youth workers will be required to read this policy and sign a form indicating that they have read and that they understand the policy and agree to abide by it. Anyone failing to do so will not be permitted to serve until the policy has been read and the form signed. All paid and volunteer staff involved with the children/youth will be required to attend a training session offered by the church on child protection.
2. Leaders of community groups of children or youth who use the church facility, including its outdoor facilities, will be required to read and comply with this Safer Sanctuaries policy and sign the acknowledgment form, unless that organization has a child abuse policy recognized by the church. Church facilities, including outdoor facilities, will not be available to groups whose leaders refuse to sign and fully comply with the policy.
3. Weekday Preschool Staff are required to successfully complete the training session.
4. The Director of Children and Youth Ministries will report the names and dates of everyone trained to each church's annual charge conference.

D. Adult-to-Child Ratios

1.  There will be a minimum of two adults **scheduled** for every organized child or youth activity. There should also be two or more unrelated and non-cohabitating adults present with any church-sponsored or community groups of children or youth using church facilities. When an overnight event is either planned at the church or sponsored by the church at another location, there shall be at least two adults present. For an all-female group, at least one of the adults must be female. For an all-male group, at least one of the adults must be male. If the group is of mixed gender, there shall be at least one male and one female adult present with the group. Physical arrangements will be made to protect the separation of sexes and youth/adults for showering and sleeping.
2. Youth Volunteers (see “Distinctions Between Persons & Roles” for definition) are welcome, however they do not count towards the adult-to-child ratio, as they are still youth members. There must be two adults present alongside a Youth Volunteer. As well, when possible, it is preferred for any youth volunteer working with children to be at least 5 years older than the oldest child in their care.
3. In rare situations that may arise where the Two-Person rule cannot be followed, the following guidelines should be observed:
 - a) Endeavor to always have more than one youth present when only one adult is working with youth;
 - b) When a youth must be taken aside for discipline or counseling, always meet in an open area where you may be observed by others;
 - c) Meeting one-on-one with a youth in a closed space is always discouraged (if this situation is necessary, the meeting should take place in a room where the occupants are in full view through an inside window or open door);
 - d) Staff, youth leaders, and teachers shall not drive children home alone.

- e) If it is not possible to have at least two adult workers in a room or defined area, the church will ensure one adult volunteer or staff can serve as “security personnel” by roving the halls between groups to closely monitor any classroom where only one adult is present.
- f) Additionally, for those times when the Two Leader Rule cannot be supported, supervision policies and procedures require at least three unrelated and non-cohabitating individuals (at least one being an adult) to be present at every function, and in each classroom, vehicle, or other enclosed area during all activities involving children, youth or vulnerable persons.

4. If the two person rule is violated the Director of Children and Youth Ministries and/or the Pastor(s) shall be notified immediately.

E. Transportation of Children and Youth

- 1. When children and/or youth are transported for church activities, they shall be transported in groups with at least two unrelated and non-cohabitating adults in each vehicle. When one-on-one adult situations are unavoidable, workers must obtain, in advance of the event, written permission [sample slip attached] from a parent or guardian for their child to accept such transportation arrangements. Also, workers shall notify the appropriate church leader of such arrangements in advance of the event. If an emergency arises which unexpectedly necessitates the violation of the 2-adult-in-a-vehicle rule, the circumstances warranting such violation shall immediately be reported to the appropriate Pastor or their designee.

F. Lodging

- 1. Rooming arrangements should provide for children and youth of the same sex to room together and adults of the same sex to room together. A child or youth should not room alone. When possible, adults’ rooms shall be next to youth rooms and youth should be checked on during the night.

2. No person will change clothes in the sleeping rooms.
3. Ordinarily, adults should not share rooms with children. An individual minor may share a room with an individual adult if the two are related (parent/child), or if written permission has been granted prior to the event by a parent or guardian. In situations where one large sleeping area is provided, two adults of the same sex shall accompany children or youth of the same sex.
4. Arrangements for non-binary children and youth shall be made on a case-by-case basis and provide for the safety of all involved.

G. Permission Slips

1. Minor children must have parent or guardian permission to participate in any overnight activity or any activity that takes place away from church grounds. That permission must be in writing, signed by a parent or guardian [see Appendix for sample]. The permission slip must identify the activity in which the child/youth will be participating. It also must identify the chaperons. The Senior Pastor or their designee may waive the requirement for permission slips where they would serve no useful purpose (for example, a picnic off church grounds where the child/youth would be accompanied by a parent.)

H. Classroom Discipline

1. Discipline will be appropriate for the age level. Discipline should be a positive teaching and learning process. Telling the child/youth what behavior is expected and what is not acceptable is the first disciplinary measure. (i.e., “We do not throw blocks. We use blocks for building.”) If this measure is not effective, the child will be guided to another activity. The adult should set realistic limits; speak directly to the child/youth; give simple, clear instructions; and be firm, but kind. It is better to use positive rather than negative statements whenever possible. If the disruptive behavior continues, the child may be removed from the situation. If isolation of the child or youth within the classroom or removal becomes necessary, the parents will be notified immediately.

I. Open Classrooms

1. Classrooms or childcare rooms may be visited without prior notice by church staff, parents, or other volunteer church workers, e.g., Chair of Education, Sunday School Superintendent, at any time. The Director of Children and Youth Ministries shall observe activities in childcare rooms and classrooms. Visibility through classroom windows in doors shall not be obscured, except temporarily for security or security-training purposes.

J. Appropriate Touch

1. The process of caring for young children involves a variety of types of physical contacts. Physical expressions of affection, such as hugging and holding young children, and verbal expressions of a warm and loving nature are encouraged. This is wholesome behavior and is essential to the well-being of children.
2. From an early age, respect for other people’s feeling and the basics of “good touch” and “bad touch” should be taught. Children should be taught that anything covered by their swimsuit is their private body area and nobody may touch it without permission or if that touch makes them uncomfortable. When checking for an injury, an adult should always ask permission to touch a child; if a child’s clothing needs to be removed, there must always be two adults present. With any child it is also respectful to ask if they would like hug or other physically comforting touch before doing so.
3. Beginning at age 3, children should be encouraged to use the restrooms and to change clothes independently. At about age 5, children begin to want privacy in the bathroom and when changing clothes, and the restroom should be guarded to make sure no one disturbs the child.
4. Adults should not initiate physical expressions of affection toward youth. Adults should be aware that youth can express unhealthy affection for adults and that this should be discouraged.

K. Social Media

1. Adults engaged in ministry to youth and children should consider their relationship with the youth or child when interacting with them using digital media, and should conduct themselves in a manner that would be acceptable on church grounds.
2. Adults should not submit (initiate) ‘friend’ requests to children or youth. Minors may feel like they are not able to decline such requests due to the disparity of power between them and adults. Exceptions to this rule should only be made in situations when the privacy settings make it difficult or impossible for the youth to find the adult’s page on the site. In these circumstances, it is acceptable for an adult to request a youth as a friend, if the youth has requested that they do so.
3. Use prudent judgment in the time you contact youth and children through social media, e-mail or other forms of digital communication. The "home phone rule" is a basic rule of thumb to use – normally do not text or chat with youth at a time you would not normally call their home phone line, i.e. before 9:00 AM or after 9:00 PM. ‘One on one’ video or chat room interaction is generally not appropriate between adults and minors.
4. Each church-related social media site, group or page must have a minimum of two unrelated and non-cohabitating administrators, who are either church leaders or adult volunteers engaged in the ministry. Administrators should review the access to the Youth ‘Closed’ group account to remove: Adult leaders who no longer actively participate in the youth program and former youth members, and their parents, who no longer actively participate in the youth program twice a year.
5. The churches have the right to access staff phones at any time to review communications with youth. All digital communication with children and youth shall be retained and made available upon request for at least six months.
6. No adult covered by this policy shall give gifts valued at more than \$10 to any child or youth, without the consent of the child or youth’s parent(s).

IX. OUTSIDE GROUPS

- A. Outside groups using the church’s facilities will abide by the protocols contained herein, or by explicit arrangement in the lease / building use agreement.

X. SAFER SANCTUARIES COMMITTEE


- A. The membership of the Safer Sanctuaries Committee shall include the Pastor(s), the Chair of Trustees(s), the Chair(s) of SPRC, the Director of Children and Youth Ministries and others as directed by the church leadership boards..
- B. The Safer Sanctuaries Committee shall annually review and propose any revisions to this policy and shall be responsible for the administration and interpretations of this policy.
- C. The Safer Sanctuaries Committee shall ensure that the policy is communicated to the churches at least annually and that a report of persons trained is submitted to the respective church’s annual charge conference.

XI. REPORTING CHILD ABUSE

- A. When an allegation of child abuse is made against a worker or member, be prepared to do the following:
 - 1. Notify the parents of the victim, and take any necessary steps to assure the child’s safety until the parents arrive. The safety of the victim must be the church’s primary concern.
 - 2. Do not confront the accused abuser with anger and hostility. Treat them with dignity, but immediately remove them from further involvement with children or youth.
 - 3. Notify the proper law enforcement or child protective services agency.
 - 4. Notify the annual conference authorities, the church’s insurance agent, and the church’s attorney.
 - 5. Keep a written record of the steps taken by the church in response.

6. Call upon your designated spokesperson to make any necessary statements or responses to the news media.
7. Prepare a brief and honest statement that can be made to the congregation without giving unnecessary details, placing blame, interfering with the victim's privacy, or violating any confidentiality concerns.
8. Be prepared to cooperate fully with the investigation conducted by law enforcement officials or child protective services.

XII. IMPORTANT NUMBERS AND CONTACT INFORMATION

- A. Contact **Child Protective Services** (24 hours a day): 703-324-7400 (in state, but out of Fairfax County, 800-552-7096)
- B. Contact the appropriate **pastor**, both, if appropriate.
 1. Community of Faith
 - a) Rev. Abi Foerster,
 - (1) Church, 703.620.1977
 - (2) pastor@cofumc.org
 2. Vale
 - a) Rev Dr. Jeffrey Haugh:
 - (1) Cell 804.687.3938
 - (2) Church, 703.620.2594
 - (3) JeffHaugh@vaumc.org
- C. Contact the **Director of Children and Youth Ministries**,
 1. Community of Faith: 703.620.1977
 2. Vale: 703-620-2594
 3. Miracle Ryder
 - a) ValeDCYM@gmail.com
 - b) NextGen@cofumc.org
- D. **District Superintendent**:
 1. Rev. Kirk Nave,  ice, 703.820.7200

E. **Insurance Company:**

1. Community of Faith
 - a) Church Mutual
 - (1) John Mackenzie, 800.554.2642,
 - (2) JMackenzie@churchmutual.com
2. Vale:
 - a) Church Mutual Richmond, VA.
 - (1) Mike Gibbons, 800.554.2642, ext 23

F. **Fairfax County Police:** 911

G. Record all phone calls on paper.

1. Include the following information: **name of person called, date, time of call, and a summary of information discussed.**

XIII. OTHER IMPORTANT NUMBERS AND INFORMATION

- A. Child Abuse and Neglect Hotline 1.800.552.7096
- B. Human Trafficking National Hotline 1.866.347.2423
- C. Human Trafficking Victim National Hotline 1.888.373.7888
- D. Domestic & Sexual Violence Hotline 703.360.7273
- E. Adult Protective Services 703.324.7450

XIV. REVISION HISTORY

- A. Approved:
 1. Community of Faith UMC 1/1/2000
 2. Vale UMC 10/11/24

XV. ACKNOWLEDGMENT OF POLICY AND RELEASE FORM

I certify that I have carefully read the Safer Sanctuaries Policy and Procedures. If my application is accepted, I agree to comply with the Safer Sanctuaries Policy and Procedures of the churches and to protect the health and safety of the children and youth in my care at all times.

I understand that failure to sign this form will disqualify me immediately from working as a volunteer/worker with the children and youth of the churches.

Applicant Printed Name

Witness Printed Name

Angelica Magne

Applicant Signature

Witness Signature



01-09-25
Date _____

Date _____