

# **Carthage UMC-Church Safe Sanctuaries Policy**

## **Introduction**

The General Conference of The United Methodist Church, in April 1996, adopted a resolution aimed at reducing the risk of child sexual abuse in the church. The following is a reflection on the adopted resolution. (Book of Resolutions, 2016 #3084) A central tenet of the Christian faith is the inherent value and worth of all children, youth, and adults. Children, youth, and other vulnerable people are least able to protect themselves in our society and are particularly vulnerable to abuse and neglect. The United Methodist Church is eager to do all it can to protect the youth, children, and other vulnerable people who participate in the life of this congregation. We believe implementing a policy and adopting procedures to protect our children, youth, and other vulnerable people recognizes that: Our Christian faith calls us to offer both hospitality and protection to our children, youth, and other vulnerable people. The Social Principles of the United Methodist Church state, "...children must be protected from economic, physical and sexual exploitation and abuse." The Social Principles also state, "...all persons are individuals of sacred worth, created in the image of God." Tragically, churches have not always been safe places for children, youth, and other vulnerable people. Neglect, sexual abuse, and exploitation occur in churches, both large and small, urban and rural. The problem cuts across all economic, cultural, racial, and ethnic lines. God calls us to make our churches safe places, protecting children, youth, and other vulnerable people from abuse. Abuse prevention and ministry protection policies and procedures are essential for congregations, not only for the protection and safety of our children, youth, and other vulnerable persons, but also for our volunteers and staff working with them. The Gospel calls us to be engaged in ministry with children, youth, and other vulnerable persons (Safe Sanctuaries: Reducing the Risk of Abuse in the Church for Children and Youth, page 10). Jesus taught, "Whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me" (Mark 9:37 NRSV) and "If any of you put a stumbling block before one of these little ones...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 18:6 NRSV).

\*\*\*\*\*We should not allow possible risks to undermine or stop our ministry. Rather, we must:

- Acknowledge the risks and develop a practical plan to address these issues;
- Take steps to prevent harm to our children, youth, and other vulnerable persons; and
- Continue to answer the Gospel's imperative to be in ministry with children, youth, and other vulnerable persons, thus making a difference in their lives. (adapted from Safe Sanctuaries: Reducing the Risk of Abuse in the Church for Children and Youth, page 10).

Safe Sanctuaries policies and implementation of practices that reflect those policies seek to fulfill this call for our church.

## **Volunteer/Staff Selection Policies**

All volunteer and paid staff who work with children, youth, and other vulnerable people at Carthage UMC will be:

- At least 21 years old. Exceptions apply for approved children's ministry helpers who must be 14 years and older, paid nursery workers who must be 18 years of age and complete all application/screening/training guidelines, youth volunteers who must be 18 years and older, for purposes of "2 screened adults" both must be 21 years of age or older. The "five years older" rule applies to all of these exemptions.

- At least five years older than the oldest child/youth they will be supervising.

- A regular attendee at Carthage United Methodist Church for at least six months.

Rare exceptions may be made in consultation with the pastor in charge for special situations.

All volunteer and paid staff (including clergy) who work with children, youth and other vulnerable people at Carthage UMC will:

- Complete and sign an application (volunteer or staff application as appropriate) and the related waivers giving permission to check references and background information.

- Provide the names and contact information of 2 references for volunteers and 4 for paid employees (paid employee references must be verified, volunteers are checked at ministry leader discretion, all references must be non related to volunteer/staff applicant)

- Undergo a criminal background check if they will have leadership responsibility for children/youth/other vulnerable people. Individuals who have been convicted of physical or sexual abuse or neglect may not work in any church-sponsored activity or program for preschoolers, children, youth or other vulnerable people, any other crimes/convictions will be addressed on a case by case basis as to if it excludes volunteer/staff from being a safe and appropriate choice for ministry, approval is needed by age specific ministry leader/senior pastor/and either Lay Leader or SPRC chair for exemption to be allowed. All applicants must be interviewed for suitability for the work they desire to do. Interviews will be conducted by the leader of the program in which the applicant will work. Church policy and guidelines should be discussed during the interview.

## **Removal of Volunteers from serving**

Even with strict adherence to policies at times it may become apparent that a volunteer is not appropriate to work with children/youth/vulnerable adults. If concerns arise whether from staff/other volunteers/parents/or children, youth, vulnerable adults, or any other person these concerns are to be reported to ministry leader IMMEDIATELY (if ministry leader is unavailable concerns are reported to senior pastor). It is then the ministry leader's responsibility to notify the senior pastor, and other advisory groups if appropriate to determine if it is still the best placement for the volunteer to serve in the area where the concerns arose. If it is determined that it is no longer appropriate the ministry area leader and the senior pastor will discuss with the volunteer and notify them they are no longer approved to volunteer in that ministry.

## **Training**

Prior to working in the youth or children ministries (or any area including other vulnerable people), workers must undergo safe sanctuary training, volunteers do not have to wait till annual scheduled training to occur, if a new volunteer or paid staff member needs training at any time during the year they are to contact the Safe Sanctuary leader to schedule needed training.

Training shall be required for all clergy, paid staff, and volunteers (e.g., youth group leaders) who regularly supervise activities for children, youth, and other vulnerable people. This training should be offered at least annually and again as needed if any changes to the safe sanctuary policy is made that requires updated training.

## **Ministry Supervision Guidelines**

Whenever supervising activities involving children and youth at Carthage UMC:

- At least two non-related adults (including at least one screened adult) will always be present.
- Children, youth, and other vulnerable people will be checked into and out of a church-sponsored activity by their parent or legal guardian or people authorized by the parent/legal guardian, exception is for those youth who are licensed drivers, those who are may check themselves in if leader has yearly permission forms on file and ensures parents/guardians are comfortable with youth checking themselves in/out of events.
- Participants will have access to a telephone or cell phone when groups are at or away from the church facility.
- One-on-one interactions with children and youth will be with an open door and visible to all. The pastor, parent or guardian, or another screened adult should be aware of any such interactions, and that person should be on site and regularly check in during one on one interactions.
- Activities with children, youth and other vulnerable populations should be open and accessible at all times. Anyone has the right to visit and observe the children's/youth's/other vulnerable person's activity, classroom, or church sponsored program at any time, unannounced as long as the two-adult rule is being followed. Exceptions to this right may be issued at the discretion of church leadership.
- All classroom and office doors will have a window or be visible from the hallway, or doors should remain open while the room is occupied.
- Windows will be kept free from adornment.
- If the two-adult rule cannot be observed, a screened, designated roamer will regularly check on groups with only one adult.
- For overnight events at the church and church-sponsored off-premise activities, two or more screened adults must be present. This arrangement must include at least one male and one female if the group is mixed gender, and must follow the UMC allowed ratio.

## **Transportation**

Whenever Carthage UMC transports children, youth, or other vulnerable people away from the church campus,

- No youth should drive to/from events, with the exception of those youth who are licensed drivers may drive themselves to on site events at Carthage UMC or local off site events within Smith County.
- An adult should never transport a child/youth/other vulnerable person alone.
- Drivers of church vehicles should be approved and covered by the church's insurance company.
- Drivers should go through the same screening process as all other paid/volunteer staff.

\*\*\*\*exceptions are made when parent/guardian is transporting their own child/youth in a personal vehicle OR if written permission has been given by parent for child/youth to be transported in other adults personal vehicle).

## **Electronic Communication and Social Media Guidelines**

The use of electronics or media communications may be useful tools in supporting ministries with children, youth, and other vulnerable people. However, in such circumstances, the following requirements shall be met:

- The volunteer or staff person shall never initiate a connection (friending, following, etc.) on social media of child/youth
- If a student initiates a connection, the child, youth, or vulnerable person's parent or guardian as well as the pastor in charge shall be notified and requires approval of the parent to accept. Also if volunteer/staff notes content being posted on social media of child/youth, ministry leader and senior pastor are to be notified and discuss with child/youth and parent/guardian if deemed appropriate. Connections are allowed between staff and children/youth only on Facebook/Instagram/Twitter not on other "disappearing

" media sites such as Snapchat, etc. Compliance with this section is mandatory for staff and preferred for volunteers/leaders.

- If an adult leader receives a private text from a child, youth, or vulnerable person that seems to be questionable, the adult leader should immediately end the conversation in the virtual space and offer opportunities to have the conversation in person and in compliance with the earlier guidelines for one-on-one conversations. The ministry supervisor and/or parent/guardian should be made aware of the incident immediately.

**Note:** If an in-person meeting is not possible, those involved will determine the most reasonable alternative in compliance with the earlier guidelines for one-on-one conversations.

- Adult leaders should post photos on social network sites only with prior written permission granted by a parent/guardian. When posted, PHOTOS MUST NOT BE TAGGED with names or location indicators. All photos must be appropriate and in keeping with the spirit of the ministry event. This also applies to volunteers at events, many times with community events volunteers/church members may take photos and not be aware that a parent/guardian of children/youth attending has not given permission for photos to be posted online. As such it is preferred that either A. Only post photos of your child/youth attending event or B. Send photos to ministry staff to post as they will have access to this information. Even if you post on your personal social media page if you tag location and your privacy settings allow it photos may appear online when church name is searched. Caution is best here.
- All in-person protection policies apply to online platform meetings like Zoom, Skype, Messenger, and so on and also in electronic communication (communication apps, text messages, email for example, two unrelated adults should be present in the virtual room just as they would be in a physical room.)

- An official church account should be established and used for online activities, not a personal account.
- Communication about online meetings should be shared with parents/guardians as well as with children, youth, and other vulnerable people.
- Adult leaders and participants should use their real names as usernames.
- Attendance of online meetings should be documented.
- All electronic communications shall be documented and retained.

## ***Guidelines for Whenever Carthage UMC hosts an activity involving children, youth, or other vulnerable people from another church or community organization:***

- Groups using the church facility will follow Carthage UMC's Safe Sanctuary Policy.

## **Guidelines for reporting concerns/abuse**

If a suspected incident of child abuse or neglect occurs or is revealed to a volunteer/paid staff person at a Carthage UMC sponsored activity, the adult in charge of the activity will:

- Ensure the safety of the child, youth, or other vulnerable person.
- Call the ministry supervisor, pastor in charge, or designee.
- Call the appropriate county/state hotline or report on website

State of Tennessee Child Abuse Hotline at 877-237-0004, online at <https://apps.tn.gov/carat/>

\*\*\*\*All staff/volunteers are mandated reporters and reporting is required, as is EVERYONE EVERYWHERE Tennessee Code **Annotated 37-1-403(i)**

## ***Congregational Covenant and Adoption***

Carthage United Methodist Church's purpose for establishing this Child, Youth, and Vulnerable Person Protection Policy and accompanying procedures is to demonstrate our total and unwavering commitment to the physical well being, emotional safety, and spiritual growth of all our children, youth, and vulnerable people. We adopt this policy and agree to adhere to it as outlined.

\*\*\*\*\*Carthage UMC volunteer and paid staff, including clergy, will be given the

opportunity for training about Safe Sanctuaries policies, procedures, and child abuse issues on a regular basis. They will complete training at a minimum of every three years after initial training and as needed based on policy changes.