

Safe Sanctuary Policy
North Charleston United Methodist Church, North Charleston, SC

Covenant Statement

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

Our Responsibility

Jesus said, “Whoever welcomes a child welcomes me.” Children are full participants in the life of the church and in the realm of God. Jesus also said, “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.” Our faith calls us to offer both hospitality and protection to children, youth, and vulnerable adults. The General Conference of the UMC has adopted resolutions aimed at eliminating any potential for child sexual abuse in the church. And yet many churches have not been safe places for children. Virtually every congregation has among its members adult survivors of early sexual trauma. Such incidents are devastating. Thus, we adopt this policy in accordance with the statement we as a congregation make at each Baptism. We will live according to the example of Christ, function as a community of love and forgiveness, nurture and care for the children and youth of our church and community. In compliance with the Annual Conference’s mandate, we establish this policy to demonstrate our commitment to the physical, emotional, and spiritual safety and well-being of all church members, participants, youth, children, and vulnerable adults.

Classifications:

Children: Infants to 5th grade.

Youth: 6th-12th grade.

Vulnerable Adults: a person 18 years or older who is unable to protect themselves from abuse, neglect, or exploitation due to a physical or mental impairment, a developmental disability, advanced age, or a combination of these factors (Google).

Staff are those in roles with greater responsibility and are considered “Primary Workers.” Primary Workers have responsibility for more interaction with, and greater access to, children, youth, and vulnerable adults. A primary worker must attend Safe Sanctuary training and

completed a background check. It is recommended that they have current CPR/First Aid certification.

Volunteers are those who work with children and youth and are supervised by a staff member. Volunteers are considered “Secondary Workers” because they work under a Primary Worker. A Secondary Worker must be at least 18 years of age, attended the Safe Sanctuary training, and had a background check. It is recommended that they complete CPR and First Aid training.

Youth Volunteers are volunteers under the age of 18. Youth workers are welcome to assist with ministries involving children and youth. However they must be supervised by a primary worker and attend Safe Sanctuary training. Youth workers serve at the discretion of the Senior pastor and/or Children’s Director and/or Youth Director. Appropriate child to student ratios need to be followed when youth workers are present.

I. Recruitment and Selection Guidelines

- A. **Five Year Older Rule** - Both Primary and Secondary Workers must be at least 5 years older than the age of the persons they are serving. Persons serving do so at the discretion of the Senior Pastor, children’s director, and/or youth director. [There may be instances where someone is a paid assistant.]
- B. **Six Month Rule** - North Charleston UMC will not use anyone as a worker for children or youth in the church unless he or she has been a member of the church or a steady participant for six months. In some situations this rule may be waived only by the Senior Pastor. In some situations those attending less than 6 months may be asked to submit a letter of recommendation in order to volunteer.
- C. **Background Checks** shall be made of all clergy and primary workers prior to employment or service. All background checks will be stored confidentially in a secure location.
- D. **Interview** - All applicants to be a Primary Worker must be interviewed for the role they are seeking to fulfill.
- E. **Safe Sanctuary Policy** - All persons who serve in ministries related to children, youth and/or vulnerable adults will be made aware of our Safe Sanctuary Policy. Additionally, Primary Workers and Secondary Workers must sign a permission form to have a background check.

II. Staff Supervision Guidelines: All meetings of children, youth, and vulnerable adults affiliated with North Charleston UMC will be governed by the following guidelines:

- A. **Two Adult Rule** - It is strongly recommended that at least two approved adults be present at all times during youth and children’s events. When feasible, both male and female adults should be present. Married couples count as one adult. If an adult has to accompany a child, youth or vulnerable adult to the bathroom, the bathroom door must be left slightly open. If the group stays overnight at the church, or if a church group leaves the premises, two or more leaders must be present and there should be both male and female chaperones present if the group is mixed gender.

- B. **Floater Rule** - This rule allows for only one Primary or Secondary Worker to be present in a classroom when there is another approved servant floating the building regularly. When using this rule the doors must remain open.
- C. **Outings Away from Church Property** - All children and youth participating in outings away from church property must have consent by a parent/guardian. If the activity is out of town or overnight, each youth and child must have a written consent form and a medical release form. During travel, line of sight between vehicles will serve to comply with the Two Adult Rule. All drivers must be approved. At no point is one adult to take a child or a group of children on an overnight outing alone. A child and an adult should also never be in a car alone together. Female staff will supervise female youth and male staff will supervise male youth in their respective/separate sleeping quarters. No adults will share a bed with children or youth.
- D. **Servant to Child Ratios** - North Charleston UMC has the following goals in maintaining servant to child ratios. Note these are goals and are subject to change given sudden increases in participation, etc. At no point should children be left in a room unsupervised.
- E. **Emergency Scenarios** - If there is an emergency situation and two adults are not available to transport a child, it is strongly recommended that the child sit in the backseat of the vehicle. The parent and the Senior Pastor should be notified as soon as possible so that there is awareness of the situation.

	On Campus	Off Campus (Day)	Off Campus (Overnight)
Infant	2:10		
2-3 years	2:14		
4-5 years	2:16	2:8	
1st - 3rd grade	2:16	2:10	2:10
4th - 5th grade	2:20	2:10	2:10
6th - 12th grade	2:30	2:14	2:17

- F. **Nursery Checkout Procedure** - All parents utilizing the church nursery will observe the procedures outlined in the nursery guidelines.
- G. **Open Door Policy** - Parents/Legal Guardians of the children served and the church staff have the right to visit and observe the children's/youth activity, classroom or church sponsored activity at any time, unannounced.
- H. **Outside Access** - There must be access to a 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 property.
- I. **Doors and Windows** - All classroom and office doors should have a window for visibility from the hallway or remain open while occupied. Windows should be kept free from adornment that would obstruct a clear view.

- J. **Confidential Discussions** - 1-1 interactions are sometimes necessary and appropriate but care must be taken that they are conducted in an environment that provides visibility by another adult. Children and youth who have confidential discussions with a staff member should be told they are free to discuss any aspects of the discussion with a parent or other adult. All incidents of suspected abuse or neglect revealed will be reported in accordance with the following policy.
 - K. **Touch** - Physical affection should be appropriate to the age of the child, youth or vulnerable adult (For example it would be appropriate for a 3 year old to sit in a servant's lap during story time but the same is NOT true for a teenager). Touching should not be initiated by the adult. It should be a response to the child's need for comforting, encouragement, or affection. It is strongly recommended that side hugs, with one arm, be used. Touching and affection should only be given in the presence of other ministry servants. Any inappropriate or questionable touching should be immediately reported to the Senior Pastor and SPRC chairperson.
 - L. **Addressing Known Offenders in the Congregation** - North Charleston UMC welcomes all people. Those who have a history of child abuse are welcome to participate in adult worship, adult Christian Education and adult social events. However, they are not to initiate direct contact with children, youth or vulnerable adults at any church event. No person convicted of any form of abuse will be allowed to work with children, youth, or vulnerable adults. Church staff will communicate these expectations to the individuals and they will agree to a Covenant of Conduct.
 - M. **Training** - Prior to working in children and/or youth ministry, staff and volunteers should undergo Safe Sanctuary Policy training. The training will include a reading and explanation of this policy, teaching and discussion on the law and issues of child abuse in church settings. It is strongly recommended that ministry staff and primary workers maintain current certification in basic First Aid and CPR. Annual Safe Sanctuary training for new and existing servants will be provided by the church. Existing servants will renew their Covenant at least every 3 years.
 - N. **Annual Review** - This Safe Sanctuary Policy will be reviewed annually to make any needed changes by the Trustees. Additional limits may be added by primary servants and/or staff but at no time may this policy be reduced or relaxed.
- III. RESPONSE BY CHURCH WORKERS TO ALLEGATIONS OR ABUSE OR INAPPROPRIATE BEHAVIOR
- A. 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 prevent future abuse. 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 Senior Pastor who will then contact the SPRC. They will then follow specific procedures. If the accused is a pastor, contact the chairperson of the SPRC.

SAFE SANCTUARY POLICY PROCEDURES

If abuse is suspected or seen:

- A. Immediately: ensure the protection of and then tend to the immediate need of the child as the situation requires.
- B. Immediately contact the Senior Pastor. If the Senior Pastor or pastoral staff are the accused party, contact the chairperson of the SPRC. They will then notify the District Superintendent.
- C. If deemed necessary, the proper authorities will be notified:
 - A. The Senior Pastor or designee will make sure that written documentation concerning the incident is recorded.
 - B. Notify the Charleston County DSS - <https://dss.sc.gov/>. The person who suspects or sees the abuse is also a mandatory reporter and will make a report online at the web address previously mentioned.
 - C. Do not attempt an investigation. If necessary, contact local law enforcement.
- D. The Senior Pastor/chairperson of the SPRC will notify the parents of the victim and take whatever steps are necessary to assure the safety of the child/youth until the parents arrive. It is important to emphasize that the proper authorities must be notified even if the parents do not wish the incident to be reported.
- E. After having reported the suspected abuse to the proper authorities, the incident is to be reported immediately to the church's attorney, insurance company, and District Superintendent. The D.S. will report the allegation to the Bishop's Office. If the accused is a clergy member of the Annual Conference, provisions of paragraph 361 of the Book of Discipline must be followed.
- F. A list of emergency numbers will be available in the front office. These numbers include: Police, Fire, 911, District Superintendent, SPRC Chair, Senior Pastor.
- G. If the accused is working in a servant or paid position with children, youth, or vulnerable adults in the church, immediately, yet with dignity and respect for the sacred worth of the person, remove the accused from further involvement with the aforementioned parties.
- H. Once the proper authorities have been contacted and the safety of the child/youth is secured, the Senior Pastor/chairperson of the SPRC may tell the accused that a report has been made. If the accused is a servant or paid staff person, that person shall be relieved of their duties until the investigation is complete. If the accused is a staff person, arrangements should be made to either maintain or suspend their income until the allegations are cleared and substantiated.
- I. Any contact with the media will be handled by the Senior Pastor or designee. Care will be taken to safeguard the privacy and confidentiality of all involved. The spokesperson should generally convey that the matter is under investigation. Any comments made prior to the conclusion of the investigation would be premature.
- J. A written report of the basic information shall be kept to ensure on-going ministry and advocacy for, victims and others involved. 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 report with the Bishop's Office where it shall remain confidential.

North Charleston UMC - Nursery Policy

It is our privilege at North Charleston United Methodist Church to provide quality nursery care for children from birth to three years of age. Our purpose is to provide a place where parents can confidently leave their children. A great deal of preparation has gone into making our nursery safe and enjoyable. Care is provided for all services. In order to provide better care for your child, we have compiled some guidelines which are outlined here. We pray you will not find these guidelines too demanding, but instead, reflective of high standards for hygiene, care, and safety. Together, we are committed to giving quality care for any child associated with our nursery.

For our Parents: Our nursery workers are prepared to provide the best possible care for your child. All linens, toys and equipment are cleaned regularly and each baby is given personal attention and will find warmth in the midst of our church.

- In order to avoid confusion and provide proper care and sanitation for the children, no one is to be in the nursery at any time other than the scheduled workers and the children. (Exceptions are only, but gladly, made for nursing mothers.)
- Note: Children are only to be in the nursery when there is a nursery worker present, not just to play between services.
- Give the child and their diaper bag to the nursery worker.
- Please remember to leave instructions on the nursery “sign-in” clipboard. Do not hesitate to be specific.
- Please notify workers if your child has any additional medical concerns besides those indicated on the child information card.
- Should we need to contact you during a service; the workers will notify you through text.
- When the service is over, please pick up your child as soon as possible. No one is allowed to take a child from the nursery except the parent/guardian or other stated on the child’s information card.
- If your child is at home with a cold, we ask that you keep him/her at home. If your child becomes ill while in the nursery, you will be notified.

For our Nursery Servants: Ephesians 4:2 “Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love.” As you contemplate stepping into the nursery, ask God for patience, understanding and discernment to meet each one of the children’s needs.

Check In/Out Procedures:

- Arrive 15 minutes before the service begins. The nursery is a ministry and service in our church and promptness honors God and those to whom you are ministering.
- Do not work if you are sick.
- Wear comfortable clothing and shoes.
- DO NOT bring hot beverages into the nursery.
- Care for the children according to their parents’s instructions. Rock, sing, read, and play to communicate God’s love to them. Seek to devote ALL your attention to them.

- Each child's diaper should be checked and/or changed each service.
- Workers are not to be with children in secluded areas.
- Anyone who enters the nursery (including visiting families) should fill out the sign-in sheet and the child information card.
- Before leaving, straighten up the nursery.

Security Procedures:

- A child information card will be filled out for each child.
- Parents will fill out the "sign-in" sheet every week. This allows parents to write out any special instructions in the comment space provided. Direct your full attention to caring for the children. Follow closely to the parent's instructions. Do not assume you know better.
- A child will only be released to the parent/guardian!
- Children are checked in through planning center as well.
- Note: There should always be at least 2 workers in each nursery. (This is for the safety of the children and also can eliminate any security problems.)
- Selecting and screening policies for Nursery Servants:
 - All workers must be members or regular attendees in good standing.
 - All applicants will complete a formal application process including taking Safe Sanctuary Training and undergoing a background check. All files will be kept confidential.

Nursery Servant Schedule:

- Servants are asked to serve for 1 Sunday per month. We ask you to mark your personal calendar ahead for the date and time you are scheduled.
- If you are unable to serve on the date or time you are scheduled, please trade with someone else on the schedule. Be sure the person with whom you are trading clearly knows the date and time. You may also call the Nursery Director.