

St. Luke United Methodist Church

Safe Sanctuary Policy

Prevention Policy for Physical and Sexual
Abuse of Children, Youth and Vulnerable
Adults

2021

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Acknowledgement and Receipt of Policy

Introduction

Background for the Policy

The General Conference of the United Methodist Church in April 1996 adopted a resolution focused on reducing the risk of child sexual abuse in the church. Excerpts from the resolution read; "our Christian faith calls us to offer both hospitality and protection to the little ones, the children. The Social Principles of the United Methodist church state that "children must be protected from economic, physical, emotional and sexual exploitation and abuse" (Paragraph 162C). God calls us to make our churches safe places, protecting children and other vulnerable persons from sexual and ritual abuse. God calls us to create communities of faith where children and adults grow safe and strong." [From *The Book of Resolutions* of the United Methodist Church -2000, pp. 180-181. Thus, in covenant with all United Methodist congregations, we adopt this policy for the prevention of child, youth, and vulnerable adult abuse in our church.

Purpose of the Policy

The following policies and procedures have been set forth by St. Luke United Methodist Church to demonstrate our absolute and unwavering commitment to ensure the physical safety and spiritual growth of all of our children, youth and vulnerable adults. In addition, these policies and procedures seek to protect paid workers and volunteers and to reduce the liability of the church from allegations of sexual abuse or misconduct.

Statement of Covenant

Therefore, as a Christian community of faith and a United Methodist congregation, we pledge to conduct the ministry of the gospel in ways that assure the safety and spiritual growth of all our children, youth, and vulnerable adults as well as all of the workers with children, youth, and vulnerable adults. We will follow reasonable safety measures in the selection and recruitment of workers; we will implement prudent operational procedures in all programs and events; we will educate our workers with children, youth, and vulnerable adults regarding the use of all appropriate policies and methods (including first aid and methods of discipline); we will have a clearly defined procedure for reporting a suspected incident of abuse that conforms to the requirements of state law; and we will be prepared to respond to media inquiries if an incident occurs.

Safe Sanctuary Policy and Procedures

Scope of Policy

This updated policy goes into effect January 1, 2015 and replaces the previous Safe Sanctuary Policy. The Safe Sanctuary Policy shall apply to all persons, including all paid and unpaid leaders, whether lay or clergy, who have any direct or indirect contact *with* children, who participate in any activities or events sponsored by St. Luke United Methodist Church, or by other organizations or individuals which occur on property under the control of St. Luke United Methodist Church, or while on events being sponsored by St. Luke United Methodist Church. Examples include but are not limited to: Sunday school, Youth Events, Children's Choirs, Confirmation trips, Respite Care, Outreach projects of the Church, all of the St. Luke School, Early Learning Center, and the St. Luke Preschool classes, events and field trips, Nursery/Childcare, etc. The Chief Administrative Officer will be the Safe Sanctuary Program coordinator, however, the day-to-day administration of the Safe Sanctuary Policy and Procedures shall fall under the ministry team which includes the following staff persons:

- Chief Administrative Officer
- Directors of the following ministries:
 - Discipleship
 - Youth Ministries
 - Children's Ministries
 - Early Learning Center
 - St. Luke Preschool
 - Respite Care
- Headmaster of the St. Luke School

These individuals will be responsible for:

1. Securely maintaining all files related to the Safe Sanctuary program.
2. Preserving the confidentiality of all aspects of the program.
3. Providing necessary training of staff persons, volunteers, parents/guardians and maintaining accountability for adhering to the Policy and Procedures.
4. Providing communications concerning the Safe Sanctuary Program to the congregation, the Staff persons of St. Luke United Methodist Church, and insuring the implementation of the Policy and Procedures.
5. Reporting any allegations of incidents of abuse and the response to any allegations of incidents of abuse, as required in this policy.

Selection of Staff and Volunteers

Employed Staff

All persons employed to serve in a supervisory capacity for children, youth or vulnerable adults shall:

1. Be at least 18 years of age.
2. Complete a permission form for a criminal records check and be cleared to serve.
3. Provide one to three character references.
4. Read and sign the Safe Sanctuary Acknowledgment form.
5. Be interviewed by one or more of the following: Chief Administrative Officer, Sr. Pastor, St. Luke Church Ministry Leader, St. Luke School Headmaster, Director of the Early Learning Center, Director of the St. Luke Preschool or related area supervisor.

Volunteers

All volunteers serving in a supervisory capacity for children, youth or vulnerable adults shall:

1. Be at least 18 years of age.
2. Complete a permission form for a criminal records check and be approved.
3. Read and sign the Safe Sanctuary Acknowledgment form.
4. Complete a personal information sheet.
5. Be interviewed by a Safe Sanctuary Committee representative.

Training of Staff and Volunteers

1. There shall be an annual training session for staff members and volunteers.
 - a. New staff members shall attend a Safe Sanctuary training session.
 - b. New volunteers will be scheduled for training by the particular ministry director, when they are approved as volunteers.
 - c. Continuing staff members and volunteers shall attend a Safe Sanctuary session for review and update at a minimum of every three years.
2. Training sessions shall include, but not be limited to, the explanation and discussion of:
 - a. Behaviors which signal potential or problems.
 - b. Guidelines for prevention.
 - c. Procedures for reporting alleged abuse.
 - d. Procedures for response to reports of alleged abuse.
3. A copy of this document shall be provided to each staff member and volunteer.

Prevention Guidelines

All meetings and activities of children, youth or vulnerable adults shall be governed by the following guidelines:

1. **Prohibited Behaviors:** The following behaviors are prohibited for staff members and volunteers:
 - a. Threatening or intentionally inflicting emotional or physical injury.
 - b. Committing any sexual offense or engaging in any sexual contact.
 - c. Making any kind of sexual advance or making a request for sexual favors.
 - d. Engaging in verbal, visual or physical conduct of a sexual nature, e.g., back rubs, massages, kissing, or similar contact.
 - e. Physical discipline, such as spanking.
 - f. Inappropriate touching of a child is not permitted. Side by side hugs are suggested instead of full body contact. Appropriate touching need not to be completely avoided, but is acceptable only in public. Workers shall be aware of how it looks and how the person being contacted may interpret the contact.
 - g. Use of the following is unacceptable and will not be tolerated at any ministry event:
 - i. Tobacco
 - ii. Alcohol
 - iii. Illegal drugs
 - iv. Firearms or other weapons, except by licensed Security Personnel employed by St. Luke.
 - v. Foul or offensive language
2. **Room policies:** When possible, doors to rooms shall be kept open, or in the case of rooms with Dutch doors, the top half of the door shall be kept open. It is acceptable to close the door to a room, when there is proper supervision.
3. **The Two Adult Rule:** Every effort will be made to have two (preferably unrelated) adults in the room or vehicle at all times. If due to, unforeseen circumstances, two adults cannot be present, the classroom door will remain open, when possible. One adult can serve with a group as long as other adults are in proximity in the building (School classes, Sunday School Classes, Youth Events).

4. **The 18-year Age Limit Rule:** Persons that work with children must be 18 years of age. No elementary children will be allowed in the nursery or preschool areas unless they are children of the volunteer or worker or under their direct supervision. No children will be allowed to escort other children to the restrooms.
5. **Two Year Older Rule:** Adult volunteers working with children are to be at least two years older than the children they are assigned. St. Luke values the presence of youth volunteers.
6. **Unauthorized Visitors:** Visitors who have not been authorized by the Ministry area Director will not be allowed to remain with the group (this includes adults and Youth).
7. **Communication:** There shall always be access to a telephone or a walkie talkie to facilitate communication and in the event of an emergency.
8. **Written Permission Forms:** Written parental / Legal Guardian permission shall be obtained when groups leave church property (medical releases/permission forms may be kept on file, but parents /legal guardians should always be informed and give permission when children, youth or vulnerable adults leave the church property).
9. **Monitoring:** Hallways, classrooms and other areas of the building will be monitored while activities for children or youth are ongoing.
10. **Discipline:** St. Luke desires to foster a sense of both fun and learning in all ministries. Volunteers should work, play and communicate with children and youth in a cooperative manner. At the same time, discipline is necessary to maintain order and respect for staff and volunteers within the classrooms and within St. Luke. In cases of inappropriate or behavior, staff and volunteers will take the following steps:
 - a. Verbally redirect the child to a more appropriate behavior.
 - b. If the individual continues to act out, he or she will be given a "Time Out", allowing the individual to return to the group when he or she is ready to act in a cooperative manner.
 - c. If an individual's uncooperative behavior persists, the volunteer will contact the Ministry Director who will provide help and guidance to the individual. The Director will then inform the parent (s) or guardian (s) of the behavioral issue. Together, the Director, the parent or guardian and the individual will agree to a plan that will encourage more cooperative behavior.
11. **Restroom Policies:** Changing a diaper and assisting a young child or vulnerable adult with the restroom as needed should take place where the adult worker and the individual is in sight with the individual's privacy protected. When the individual is taken to a restroom outside of the classroom or activity site, check the restroom before the individual is permitted to enter to ensure it is safe.

12. Unattended Persons: All paid staff members, volunteers, and other responsible adults have a responsibility to watch out for unattended children, youth or vulnerable adults. The child should be escorted to the Ministry Director or Parent/Guardian if the individual is wandering alone or in with buddies and not participating in either the event or childcare. Adult judgment is expected to determine if the unattended person has been "sent" by a parent/guardian to show responsibility by doing something alone. Those engaged in mischief should be approached right away. Whenever possible, two adults should approach the individual and escort them. Children, youth and vulnerable adults may not be left in a room by themselves or allowed to roam the St. Luke campus.

13. Driving Rules: Volunteers wishing to drive other passengers locally in their own vehicles must agree to a review of their driving history and provide proof of liability insurance on their automobiles. Volunteers or Staff must have prior approval and clearance prior to driving one of the Church owned buses. Each passenger must wear a seatbelt when available during St. Luke off-campus trips.

14. Overnight Accommodations: Events that require overnight accommodations require at least (2) leaders of each gender. At single gender overnight events, at least two or more adults present will be of the same gender as the participating children, youth or vulnerable adults. When staying in a hotel, leaders shall sleep in separate rooms from children, youth or vulnerable adults, or if necessary for children to share a room with a leader, leaders shall sleep in separate beds from children, youth or vulnerable adults so long as any one leader shall not be alone with any one child. Recognizing accommodations may be restrictive in some situations; one leader is adequate, so long as any one leader shall NOT be alone with any one child, youth or vulnerable adult.

15. Fire and Building Safety Guidelines:

a. **Prevention Measures:** Be alert to any potential causes for accidents, injuries, or fire in your area and during your event. If repairs are needed in an area, (frayed cord, broken chairs/tables, water on the floor, etc.) notify the Ministry Director or leader of the ministry event. The buildings, grounds, and equipment must be maintained in order to protect the safety of all.

b. **First-Aid:** First-Aid care shall be administered as soon as possible. First-aid kits and a guide to emergency care shall be available. If necessary, 911 shall be called for local emergency services to respond. If a child, youth or vulnerable adult arrives ill or becomes ill (fever, vomiting, etc.) during a ministry event, the parent/guardian shall be contacted and asked to pick up their child, youth or vulnerable adult. These steps shall be followed when providing first-aid that involves cleaning an open wound, bleeding cut, or examining the mouth:

i. Wear disposable sterile gloves

ii. Wash hands before and after administering aid.

Outside Groups:

St. Luke United Methodist Church supports Boy Scouts and Girl Scout groups and other outside approved activities. All leaders must meet and adhere to the requirements of this Safe Sanctuary Policy and Procedures. Everyone should be aware that our church building is often used by groups outside our congregation. There may, at any time, be outside groups consisting of non-church members using the building. They will be made aware of this Policy and Procedures and must adhere to it.

Procedures for Reporting Alleged Incidents of Abuse

- I. If an adult in charge suspects abuse of a child, youth or vulnerable adult report abuse by:
 - a. Any member of church staff or volunteer
 - b. Any person present at a church sponsored meeting/activity.
2. The following procedures shall apply:
 - a. The adult in charge shall document, in writing, the incident. Documentation shall be signed by the reporting adult and dated.
 - b. Notify the applicable Ministry Director, Senior Pastor, Chief Administrative Officer, Lay Leader or Staff Parish Chair. If the Senior Pastor is the accused party, notify the Lay Leader, Staff Parish Relations Committee Chair and the District Superintendent.
3. If reasonable cause is established:
 - a. The Senior Pastor/Chief Administrative Officer/ Lay Leader/Staff Parish Chair, shall notify:
 - i. Georgia Department of Family and Children's Services (According to the laws of the state of Georgia, all persons are mandatory reporters of child abuse. If a person learns of or witnesses an instance of abuse, that person shall immediately report the alleged incident of abuse or suspected abuse to the appropriate Church Leadership, who will immediately notify county or state authorities).
 - ii. District Superintendent of the NW District
 - iii. Insurance Carrier
4. The Senior Pastor/Chief Administrative Officer/ Lay Leader/Staff Parish Chair may then notify:
 - a. An Attorney
 - b. Pastoral Care Consultant (the South Georgia Conference Pastoral Counselor –

Rev. Deborah Wight-Knight (205 North Davis Drive, Warner Robins, Georgia 31093; Phone: 478-929-1032), or the Pastoral Institute (2022 15th Ave., Columbus, GA 31901; (706) 649-6500)

5. Should an adult in charge suspect abuse or a child, youth or vulnerable adults report abuse occurring away from a church-sponsored function, the following procedures shall apply:
 - a. All mandated reporters shall follow their legal guidelines for suspected abuse.
 - b. Those adults other than mandated reporters shall document the incident. The documentation shall be signed by the reporting adult and dated.
 - c. Notify the Senior Pastor/ Chief Administrative Officer/ Lay Leader /Staff Parish Chair
 - d. If reasonable cause is established, the Senior Pastor/ Chief Administrative Officer/ Lay Leader shall notify the Georgia Department of Children & Family Services.

Procedures for the Response to Alleged Incidents of Abuse

If allegations of abuse are made, our response is guided by the following principles:

1. Every allegation will be taken seriously.
2. Adequate care and respect must be offered to the alleged victims and alleged perpetrators until the allegation can be substantiated or cleared.
3. The needs of the alleged victim will be given the highest priority. The safety and security of the alleged victim must be safeguarded before the person accused of abuse is confronted.
4. The parents/guardian of the suspected victim will be notified immediately.
5. Full cooperation will be given to all civil authorities.
6. All procedures listed in the previous section on Reporting will be strictly followed.
7. A respect for privacy and confidentiality will be maintained. All records relating to the matter will be maintained in confidential files in the Administrative office.
8. All efforts in handling the situation will be carefully documented.
9. The Senior Pastor or Chief Administrative Officer will notify the liability insurer and the legal counsel for the Church about the alleged incident within 24 hours.

10. The Senior Pastor will be the sole spokesperson for St. Luke United Methodist Church and the District Superintendent will be the sole spokesperson for the district insofar as media inquiries are concerned.
11. All persons accused must be treated with dignity and support. That person will be immediately relieved of further paid or volunteer responsibilities in the area where he/she was accused, as circumstances dictate, until the allegations are cleared or substantiated.
12. The victim and victim's family shall receive immediate ministry support from St. Luke if needed.

South Georgia Conference Policy

When hosting a Conference or District event the South Georgia Annual Conference, the attached "Safe Sanctuary" policy will be followed.

Approval and Changes to Safe Sanctuary Policy

Following the approval of this policy by the St. Luke Administrative Board, the Safe Sanctuary Policy can only be changed with the approval of the St. Luke Administrative Board. The Safe Sanctuary Policy will be available in the church office on the public computer drive and on the Church website.

Miscellaneous Information

Insurance Coverage

St. Luke Church carries liability insurance which covers all employed staff members, authorized volunteers, Church members and parents of children, youth or vulnerable adults who may volunteer to serve in a ministry. The policy includes coverage for acts of abuse occurring on church property or during a church sponsored activity.

Education & the Congregation

Educational opportunities may be provided. These shall include:

1. **Congregation:** Presentations designed to develop awareness of the problem of child, youth or vulnerable adults abuse and share the church's prevention plan.
2. **Parents:** Classes and presentations which focus on sexuality education and safety.
3. **Children/Youth:** Classes and presentations which focus on sexuality education and safety.
4. **Vulnerable Adults:** Classes and presentations which focus on the caring for our aging parents.

Definitions

- **Adult** - An adult is a person of 18 years of age or older.
- **Child** - A child is a person of less than 18 years of age.
- **Vulnerable Adult** - An adult with diminished mental or physical capacity who is appropriately placed in programs for special care.
- **Child Abuse** - Any non-accident injury or pattern of injuries to a child inflicted or allowed to be inflicted by a parent, guardian, caretaker, or custodian. Child abuse includes:
 - **Physical Abuse** - Any non-accidental physical injury or injuries by any person to a child. Examples of physical abuse include, but are not limited to: beating, harmful restraint, use of a weapon or instrument, or actions that result in or could result in serious physical injury.
 - **Sexual Abuse** - Any sexual behavior imposed on a child by any person. This involves a range of activities, including fondling or other inappropriate physical

contact. It also includes exhibitionism, child pornography, and suggestive behaviors or comments.

- Emotional Abuse -The expressing of attitudes of behaviors by any person toward a child that may create serious emotional or psychological damage. Examples include rejecting, isolating, terrorizing, ignoring or corrupting a child on a sustained and repetitive basis.
- Neglect – Child neglect can be defined as any serious disregard for a child's supervision, care, nutrition or discipline.
- Child Care or Nursery – A room or area where children are kept and supervised by a paid care giver while a parent attends an adult event.
- Children's Event – A meeting, class, or activity designed specifically for children from birth through the fifth grade.
- Youth or Student Event -A meeting, class, or activity designed specifically for Youth or Students from Middle School through the High School.
- Event – An event is a meeting, class, or other activity that is sponsored by St. Luke. An event will typically begin at St. Luke and end at St. Luke, although participants may travel to other locations. Transportation to and from St. Luke may be by private vehicles or church buses for the event.
- Responsible Adult – An adult who is responsible for the care of children at a St Luke Church, St. Luke School, St. Luke Early Learning Center, St. Luke Preschool or St. Luke Respite Care sponsored event.
- Senior Pastor -The Ordained Elder appointed by the Bishop to serve St. Luke United Methodist Church as the lead pastor.
- Staff Member -A paid staff member of St Luke Church, St. Luke School, St. Luke Early Learning Center, St. Luke Preschool or Respite Care.
- Director or Pastor – A paid staff member responsible for a particular ministry of the church or schools.
- Volunteer -An adult who assists in a leadership or support role, including chaperones, of St. Luke Church, St. Luke School, St. Luke Early Learning Center, St. Luke Preschool or St. Luke Respite Care and has been approved for service and successfully completed Safe Sanctuary Training.
- Outside Group – any group that does not fall under the responsibility of St. Luke United Methodist Church, its ministries, its staff or congregation.
- Scouting Programs -Official Programs of the Boy Scouts of America and Girl Scouts of America.

- **Unattended Child** – A child that is not in the direct line of sight at all times of the parent/guardian or their designated attendee.

Safe Sanctuary Task Force Members

- Senior Pastor
- Chief Administrative Officer
- Director of Security
- Director of Children's Ministries
- Director of Youth Ministries
- Director of Children's and Youth Choir
- Head of St. Luke School
- Director of St. Luke Early Learning Center
- Director of St. Luke Preschool
- Director of Respite Care
- Chair of the Administrative Board
- Chair of Staff Parish Relations Committee
- Two St. Luke members "at large"