



## POLICY STATEMENT FOR THE CREATION OF A SAFE SANCTUARY

*"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."*

-(The Book of Resolutions of the United Methodist Church - 2000, pp. 180-181)

The purpose of this policy is to create an environment at OGUMC where reasonable safety measures are taken to safeguard the physical, spiritual, and emotional welfare of all children and youth who participate in the ministries of OGUMC.

This policy applies to all paid and volunteer staff who participate in OGUMC children and youth programs and ministries, including Church sponsored events held in any off campus location.

### **DEFINITIONS**

- **Adult** – An individual who is 18 years of age or older will be considered an adult with the exception that they will remain a youth and part of youth ministries (subject to protections of the safe sanctuary policies) until they complete/terminate their secondary education, and thereafter may remain part of youth ministries until September 1 of the year they complete/terminate their secondary education.
- **Buddy** - another child of the same gender who has been assigned to travel with a child if, in the event of an emergency, a child must leave his/her supervisory group.
- **Child** - any person in fifth grade or younger.
- **Church Administrator** – is the person in the office who oversees the business of OGUMC.
- **Ministry Leaders** - either paid or volunteer staff persons who have been designated by the church to supervise a program or ministry area (e.g. Director of Children's Ministries, Youth Director or Adult Chair of Youth Council, Preschool Director).
- **OGUMC** - Oak Grove United Methodist Church.
- **Paid Staff** - compensated employees of Oak Grove United Methodist Church.
- **Program Staff** – specific staff hired and paid by OGUMC who oversee designated ministry areas at OGUMC.
- **Staff** - any paid or volunteer adult who has direct or indirect supervision with any child or youth.
- **Staff Parish Relations Committee (SPRC) Chair** – SPRC is the Human Resources' Ministry of OGUMC.
- **Volunteer Staff** – any unpaid adult or youth who has direct or indirect supervision of any child or youth at OGUMC.
- **Youth** – anyone 6<sup>th</sup> grade through 12<sup>th</sup> grade and under the age of 18 or still in high school (see definition of adult for exception for those who turns 18 years old while still pursuing secondary education).
- **Youth Helper** – a volunteer under the age of 18 assisting with children's activities, but cannot be considered adult volunteer staff for purposes of meeting the two adult rule and should be supervised themselves.

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## **SCREENING PRACTICES FOR CREATING A SAFE SANCTUARY AT OAK GROVE CHURCH**

In an effort to create the safest possible environment for children and youth within OGUMC, the following screening measures will be utilized:

1. **Six months active involvement:** Prospective volunteer staff must have continuous active involvement with the church for at least six months before applying to lead the youth or children of OGUMC. Six months active involvement is a general time frame to allow a relationship to be established between applicant and OGUMC and for OGUMC to assess applicant's suitability to work with children and youth.
2. **Interview:** Prospective paid and volunteer staff must have an interview with the Ministry Leader responsible for that ministry area to ascertain gifts and talents for ministry and must complete the OGUMC Child/Youth Worker Application. The person conducting the interview will contact references as needed and any additional persons as the circumstances dictate. A written record of such contacts and a copy of the application will be retained by the OGUMC Administrator.
3. **Criminal/Driving Background Check:** Prior to service, prospective paid and volunteer staff must complete the *Permission to Obtain a Background Check* (see attachment). By signing this form, the applicant will give OGUMC permission to contact appropriate law enforcement and other related agencies and individuals with knowledge or information regarding the applicant's past. Information and reports collected by *Church Administrator* will be reviewed by the *Ministry Leader* for the designated ministry area and at times other designated paid ministry leaders of OGUMC . If any of the reports create concerns sufficient to raise questions about the fitness of the prospective applicant for working with children or youth, and the reviewing OGUMC Ministry Leader, after consultation with the pastor, is unable to adequately resolve these concerns, the application will be denied. The applicant will be informed by the Ministry Leader or Pastor in a confidential and sensitive manner. The specific reasons should be given whenever possible. The screening is good for five years after which rescreening will be necessary.
4. **Attend training and sign covenant:** Before beginning service, all staff for children and youth ministries will be required to read the *Policy Statement for the Creation of a Safe Sanctuary* and sign the *Covenant Statement for the Creation of a Safe Sanctuary* (see attachment) indicating that they have read and that they understand the policy and agree to abide by it. Covenant statements will be renewed annually. Training should include the definition, recognition and response to child abuse, appropriate behavior for teachers and staff for child/youth events, review of the church safe sanctuary policy and appropriate interpersonal boundaries with children and youth.
5. **Pledge:** All paid and volunteer staff affirm and promote that alcohol use, recreational drug use and tobacco use are prohibited at any Church-sponsored program, event or ministry involving youth or children.
6. **Yearly renewal:** Before beginning service and periodically as the Ministry Leaders or Pastor deem necessary, all paid and volunteer staff must attend training classes. This training will be renewed at least yearly. Failure to participate in training sessions may result in volunteer and paid staff persons being relieved of their duties.

## **PRACTICES FOR SUPERVISING CHILDREN AND YOUTH**

The following practices will be followed by all paid and volunteer staff while supervising children and youth at OGUMC or at OGUMC sponsored trips and events held off church property:

1. **Two Adults:** All staff will be assigned in teams of at least two adults, in compliance with the *Safe Sanctuary Policy*, who are not related by marriage.
  - a. If two adults who are related by marriage are assigned to work together, a third unrelated adult, who is in compliance with the *Safe Sanctuary Policy*, must also be assigned to supervise the group.
  - b. If two unrelated staff persons are not available, then either the group must combine with another group to make possible the two adult rule, or the classroom doors are to remain open or the activity is conducted in an otherwise open and observable area and no fewer than two students with the adult teacher except in limited counseling sessions. In such cases where only one adult is involved in the activity or in the classroom, a designated safe sanctuary approved adult should periodically check in on the activity/classroom.
  - c. In addition to the two adult rule, the following ratios will apply for each group: (a) One adult to three children, 0 to 12 months of age, (b) One adult to four children, ages 12 to 24 months, (c) One adult to six children, ages 24 months to 36 months, (d) One adult to nine children or youth ages 3 to 17 years.
2. **Name Tags:** Any staff person working with children or youth on site at OGUMC must wear a nametag.
3. **Sign in/Sign out procedure:** Adults responsible for children who are infant through toddler should register their child and indicate the names of the authorized person(s) to whom the child may be signed-out. Adults responsible for children age 2 through 5<sup>th</sup> grade should sign their child in and out of Sunday School and other children's ministry activities. Children being picked up by a non-authorized adult is forbidden. Youth need not sign in or sign out for Youth Ministry events, and are considered their parents' or guardians' responsibility prior to arriving either at OGUMC or at an off-site event where the transportation is not provided by OGUMC and when they leave the church or off-site event where not being transported by OGUMC.
4. **Age Limits:** Staff and volunteers should be at least five years older than the oldest child/youth being supervised. No one under the age of eighteen should be given supervisory capacity.
5. **Unannounced Visits:** Staff and/or parents will have an open invitation to make unannounced visits any time volunteer staff is meeting with any child(ren) or youth.
6. **Special Assignments by Staff:** Volunteer staff who are Safe Sanctuary approved may be assigned to roam between children or youth classrooms. These persons will serve as extra hands if needed or they may step in to help in an emergency.
7. **Buddy system:** If a school age child (1-5<sup>th</sup> grade) must leave the group (i.e. go to the bathroom) he/she will be assigned to travel with a buddy. If a preschool child (2 years old-kindergarten) needs to leave the group (i.e. go to the bathroom), the entire class will move as a group, or if appropriate, the child will depart with a buddy and be accompanied by two adults who are in compliance with the *Safe Sanctuary Policy*.
8. **Dismissal:** Children will be dismissed from the group only if accompanied by the child's parent, guardian, the person checking in the child, or the person designated by the check-in person for that day only (who has written notification from the parent/guardian). If person is not known by the ministry staff, a picture ID is required.
9. **Restroom Guidelines:** Children five years of age and younger should use a classroom bathroom if one is available. If a classroom bathroom is not available, the buddy system set forth in paragraph 7 may be implemented, or a staff member may escort the child to the bathroom. The staff member

should check the bathroom first to make sure that it is empty, and then allow the child/children inside. The staff member should then remain outside the bathroom door and escort the child/children back to the classroom. If a child is taking longer than seems necessary, the staff member should open the bathroom door and call the child's name. If a child needs assistance, the staff should prop the bathroom door open, and leave the stall door open as they assist the child. For children over the age of five, it is preferable that at least one adult male take a boy/boys to the restroom and at least one adult female should take a girl/girls. The staff should check the bathroom first to make sure the bathroom is empty, and then allow the child/children inside. The staff member should then remain outside the bathroom door and escort the child/children back to the classroom. For the protection of all, staff should never be alone with a child in a bathroom with the door closed and never be in a closed bathroom stall with a child. Parents are strongly encouraged to have their children visit the bathroom prior to each class.

10. **Special times of interaction:** Staff must not engage in isolated one-to-one interaction with children or youth. On occasion staff may need to meet individually with a child or youth. In such cases, steps to avoid being in an isolated area must be taken.
  - a. In the event that one-to-one interaction is necessary, every attempt will be made to hold the meeting in a well-lit public place. Any meeting with a child or youth conducted indoors must take place in a room with a window in the door, an interior window, or the door will be left open. If no other adult is present in the building when counseling is requested/needed, the session should be moved to a public place, such as a restaurant or outside where other people are present.
  - b. When possible, every attempt will also be made to notify the child's or youth's parent or another staff member in advance of the meeting. If advance notification is not possible, either the child's or youth's parent or another staff member will be notified immediately after the meeting has occurred.
  - c. Children kindergarten or older are not to be held on any adult's lap. All adults should be careful in how they touch children and youth, and there should be no touching against the will of a child/youth or touching that creates an uncomfortable environment for the child/youth or is potentially over stimulating (e.g. no massages, no excessive roughhousing, no children on shoulders). This provision is not intended to prevent appropriate and welcome hugging or touching to prevent injury or ensure safety.
11. **Off-site events:** There shall be at least two adults present for all trips, retreats and other times children/youth gather at or away from the church building. Three adults are preferred so that in the event of an emergency, there will be adequate supervision.
  - a. There should be at least one adult of each gender present at co-ed overnight events. At single gender overnight events, at least one of the two or more adults present will be of the same gender as the children/youth.
  - b. While participating in overnight activities, staff persons shall sleep in separate rooms, if reasonably possible, from children/youth. When it is necessary for children/youth to share a room with a staff person, the staff person shall sleep in a separate bed. When available accommodations require that adults and youth sleep in the same room, the two adult rule shall be observed if at all possible. Under no circumstance should there be one adult and one youth alone sleeping in the same room.
  - c. The transportation driver(s) for children/youth events held away from OGUMC property must be at least 21 years of age with 3 years consecutive licensed driving experience. (Drivers 76 and over must provide written approval from a physician. At age 81, a driver will no longer be approved to serve as a driver.)
  - d. The driver must have a valid state driver's license, provide proof of insurance, have a good driving record and successfully pass a background check. The driver should be accompanied by a

second adult staff member not related by marriage. The trip leader must first clear all drivers with the Children's or Youth Ministry leader.

- e. When transporting participants to off-site activities, no vehicle will contain only one adult (driver) and one child/youth, unless it is driven by the parent of the child/youth. It is the policy of OGUMC that there will be two safe sanctuary approved adults in the vehicle containing one or more child/youth whenever reasonably possible. However, when not reasonably possible, vehicles will contain either one driver and two or more participants or two adults and any number of children (within the seat belt limitations of the vehicle, as seatbelt use is mandatory). Use of child safety seats which meet federal standards is required for children under 6 years of age. Drivers and passengers must follow airbag age/weight regulations per specific vehicle guidelines. If there is an extenuating circumstance causing only one adult and one child/youth to travel together in a vehicle, permission must be obtained from a parent or legal guardian of the child/youth. This permission is from the parent/guardian. The driver of any vehicle transporting children or youth for OGUMC shall refrain from cell phone use while driving.

12. **Reporting violations of the policy:** If any paid or volunteer staff suspects that a policy has been broken, he/she must report the incident to a supervising Ministry Leader or a pastor. The incident will be documented and/or addressed as appropriate by the Ministry Leader or pastor.

13. **Permission slips and medical release forms:** In order for a child/youth to participate in a field trip or church sponsored event away from OGUMC, a permission slip signed by his/her parent or legal guardian must be turned in before each trip. The permission slip, including permission for emergency medical care, shall be carried by the person in charge of each trip or event. Ministry leaders or paid or volunteer staff must verbally review policies, procedures, expectations, permission slip covenants, etc. with those children/youth participating before each departure.

### **PRACTICES FOR THE REPORTING OF SUSPECTED INCIDENTS OF SEXUAL ABUSE OF CHILDREN OR YOUTH**

Child sexual abuse is a tragic reality in our communities. Although we would much prefer to deny the reality, the potential sexual abuse of children and youth in our churches is an inescapable fact. We, as members of the community of faith at OGUMC, are called to remember the pledge made as each child is baptized. Remembering that, we are called to make the church a safe and holy place where children and youth will be confirmed and strengthened in their faith. We fail in our responsibilities if we neglect to take adequate precautions against abuse in our churches.

Should there be an allegation of child/youth sexual abuse, the following procedures shall be followed:

1. The observer shall immediately begin documenting all observations and immediately, yet with dignity and respect for the sacred worth of the accused, remove the accused from further involvement with children and/or youth, and secure the safety of the child/youth. Parents should be notified promptly, unless one or both of the parents is the alleged abuser.
2. The observer shall contact the Department of Social Services for the municipality in which the victim resides (Chesapeake: 757-382-2020, Virginia Beach: 757-385-3400, Norfolk: 757-664-6022, Portsmouth: 757-393-9500, Suffolk: 757-514-7458) or if place of victim's residence is unknown, at the state hotline numbers (1-800-552-7096) in state; 1-804-786-8536 – out of state) for the Child Protective Services Division of the Virginia Department Social Services.
3. Once reported, the reporter shall notify the pastor and/or the Ministry Leader of the substance of the allegations, unless the allegations involve the pastor. If allegations involve the pastor, the reporter shall notify the *Chairperson of Staff Parish Relations Committee* and he/she shall immediately notify the *District Superintendent* who shall direct the next steps taken by the

church in responding to the allegations. The provisions of this policy shall continue to apply except as the District Superintendent directs that other steps be taken.

4. The Pastor shall notify the church's insurance company and the District Superintendent (if the District Superintendent is unavailable, the Pastor shall report the incident to the Bishop's Office). The Pastor shall also appoint a single spokesperson for the church.
5. The Pastor, staff and members of the church will not confront the accused with the allegation. The church will cooperate with the Department of Social Services while the allegation is being investigated. If the accused has assigned duties within the life of the church, the *Staff Parish Relations Committee* will determine if the accused shall be relieved of his/her duties until the conclusion of the investigation by Social Services.
6. The Pastor and the Ministry Leader should keep a written report of the steps taken by the church in response to the reported abuse. The report should be brief and contain only factual information relevant to the situation. It shall be kept in a secure place. It shall be written in ink or typed to prevent it from being changed.

### **PRACTICES FOR THE REPORTING OF SUSPECTED INCIDENTS OF CHILD ABUSE (APPLICABLE TO CHILDREN OR YOUTH)**

Because of our commitment to care for all God's children and protect the vulnerable, OGUMC activities are to fully comply with the child abuse protection provisions set forth in the Code of Virginia. Section 63.2-100 and 63.2-1509 of the Code of Virginia define and require the reporting of numerous types of maltreatment. The laws applies to any child under the age of 18 years when a parent or any person responsible for the child's care:

- Causes or threatens to cause non-accidental physical or mental injury including but not limited to, striking, biting, or shaking. Injuries include, but are not limited to bruises, fractures, cuts and burns ;
- Has a child present during the manufacture or attempted manufacture of a controlled substance or during the sale of such substance where such activity would constitute a felony;
- Neglects or refuses to provide adequate food, clothing, shelter, emotional nurturing, or health care;
- Abandons the child;
- Neglects or refuses to provide adequate supervision in relation to the child's age and level of development;
- Knowingly leaves a child alone in the same dwelling with a person, not related by blood or marriage, who has been convicted of an offense against a minor for which registration is required as a violent sexual offender, or;
- Commits or allows to be committed any illegal sexual act upon a child, including but not limited to incest, rape, indecent exposure, prostitution, or allows a child to be used in any sexually explicit visual material.

An act of child abuse may be committed by any person responsible for the care of another individual who is less than eighteen years of age. It does not matter whether the person caring for the child under the age of 18 is a compensated or volunteer worker parent or guardian. It only matters that a child was abused or neglected by the person who, on the occasion in question, was responsible for the child's care. Should there be suspicion of child/youth abuse, the following procedures shall be followed:

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1. The paid or volunteer staff person shall immediately begin documenting all observations.
2. The paid or volunteer staff person shall consult with the Ministry Leader and/or pastor concerning future action with the exception of sexual abuse, in which case the protocol for allegation of child sexual abuse outlined above shall be followed.
3. In the event the paid/volunteer staff observer, Ministry Leader or Pastor determines that observed behavior is not just inappropriate but gives rise to suspicion of child/youth abuse, the Ministry Leader/Pastor, paid or volunteer staff person must ensure a report is filed with the Department of Social Services for the municipality in which the victim resides (Chesapeake: 757-382-2020, Virginia Beach: 757-385-3400, Norfolk: 757-664-6022, Portsmouth: 757-393-9500, Suffolk: 757-514-7458) or if place of victim's residence is unknown, at the state hotline numbers (1-800-552-7096) in state; 1-804-786-8536 – out of state) for the Child Protective Services Division of the Virginia Department Social Services. Staff and volunteers shall report even if they lack certainty that an individual has been abused. Investigating whether an individual has or has not been abused and ultimately whether a report of suspected abuse is, in fact, based upon actual abuse is a matter to be resolved by local and state professionals. Any reported behavior that is of a serious nature, although not giving rise to suspicion of child abuse, shall be brought to the attention of the Pastor and Ministry Leader who shall participate in meetings with the individual involved in the misconduct, and appropriate and prompt warnings shall be issued and remedial action taken.

## **Implementation**

Unless otherwise specified by the Discipline, or otherwise specifically stated within this policy, it shall be the responsibility of the Trustees to implement this Policy, to design and conduct future training, and to ensure the ongoing effectiveness of this Policy.

## **Application**

All of those who participate in the life of this congregation and use its facilities – individuals, organizations, and groups within and outside this congregation, are expected to respect, implement, and adhere to these provisions as a minimum.

**COVENANT STATEMENT  
FOR THE CREATION OF A SAFE SANCTUARY  
AT OAK GROVE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH**

The congregation of Oak Grove United Methodist Church is committed to providing a safe and secure environment for all children, youth and adults 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 enter and as a place in which all people can experience the love of God through relationships with others.

1. No person who has been convicted of child abuse (either sexual abuse, physical abuse, or emotional abuse) should volunteer to work with children or youth in any church-sponsored activity.
2. All staff involved with children or youth of our church must be active participants of the congregation before beginning a volunteer assignment.
3. All staff involved with children and youth must strictly adhere to the procedures found in the policy statement for the *Creation of a Safe Sanctuary* to ensure children and youth are safe and protected.
4. Staff with children and youth shall attend regular training and educational events provided by the **church**.
5. Staff shall immediately report to their supervisors any behavior that seems inappropriate.

Please answer the following questions:

1. As a staff person in this congregation, do you agree to observe and abide by all church policies regarding working in ministries with children and youth?  **Yes**  **No**
2. As a staff person in this congregation, do you agree to participate in training and educational events provided by the church related to your assignment?  **Yes**  **No**
3. As a staff person in this congregation, do you agree to promptly report abusive or inappropriate behavior to the proper authorities?  **Yes**  **No**
4. While serving as a staff person in the ministries with children or youth, do you agree to inform a minister of this congregation if you have ever, or are ever, convicted of child abuse?  **Yes**  **No**

I have read the *Covenant Statement for the Creation of Safe Sanctuary at Oak Grove United Methodist Church* and the *Oak Grove United Methodist Policy Statement for the Creation of a Safe Sanctuary* and I agree to observe and abide by the policies set forth in these documents.

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**Signature of Applicant**

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**Print Name**

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**Date**

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