

Bethany United Methodist Church

Safe Sanctuaries Policy and Procedures

Concerning Children, Youth and Vulnerable Adults

At Bethany UMC it is our belief that children, youth and vulnerable adults all have a significant place in our church. According to Micah 6:6-8 (NRSV), God *requires* us “to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God.” Further, our Methodist founding father, John Wesley, had three rules he lived by: Do no harm, do good, and stay in love with God. Bethany UMC is intentional about doing no harm and providing justice for all – particularly for our most vulnerable. In Christian love we welcome and create a safe place for each of God’s children within our church.

In the cause of justice for these groups, and to exhibit integrity within our congregation, we have developed the following list of policies and guidelines which are designed to prevent harm through accident or abuse. This policy is applicable in all Bethany ministries as well as for all outside groups’ activities held at Bethany UMC. While this Safe Sanctuaries Policy is primarily established to prevent the abuse of children, youth and vulnerable adults, this policy also serves to protect staff and volunteers from uncertainty and unfounded or malicious allegations of abuse. Our comprehensive policy includes procedures for applicant screening, training, supervision, reporting and response.

DEFINITIONS

The following are terms and their definitions for the purpose of this Safe Sanctuaries Policy:

Active Participant: a congregant who has participated in church activities (which may include worship, serving, groups or classes) for at least 6 months.

Activity: any scheduled event or program in which Children, Youth or Vulnerable Adults are under the direct supervision of church Staff persons or Volunteers.

Adult: a person 18 years old or older (who is not in high school).

Caregiver: A Screened Adult, paid or unpaid, who directly supervises Children on behalf of the Children's Ministry.

Childcare Staff Member: Adult or Youth age 17 or older who has completed a formal job application, interview process, reference and background check.

Child or Children: any person from infancy to 5th grade.

Responsible Adult: the adult given responsibility or permission (parental or legal) to make decisions regarding a Child, Youth or Vulnerable Adult's participation and communication with Bethany UMC.

Roamer: a Screened Adult who will roam the area and make frequent, unannounced visits with a room/location in which there is only one Screened Adult present with Children, Youth or Vulnerable Adults.

Screened Adult/Volunteer: an Adult who has completed a background check.

Volunteer: a person who conducts or assists with activities within the church but is not paid by the church.

Vulnerable Adult: includes any person 18 years of age or older with diminished physical, mental or emotional capacities who is at risk for neglect, abuse, or exploitation of resources.

Youth: denotes any person or group of Children from 6th-12th grades.

1. Prerequisites for leading or supervising a program or activity involving Children, Youth, or Vulnerable Adults

- a. **6 Month Rule:** Active Participant of **Bethany UMC** for at least six months prior to being appointed a leader or supervisor.
 - b. **5 Years Older Rule:** It is best practice that all Staff and Volunteers be at least five years older than the age of the oldest Child or Youth for which they are responsible.
- 2. Background Check:** All Applicants for Staff or Volunteer positions must submit to a nationwide background check before working with or near Children, Youth or Vulnerable Adults. Background checks will be initiated by a designated staff person and renewed annually. Background checks conducted mid-year or later will be renewed at the beginning of the following year.
- 3. Training**
- a. A copy of the Safe Sanctuaries policy will be provided to all volunteers and paid staff prior to working with Children, Youth, and Vulnerable Adults.
 - b. Safe Sanctuary training will be provided annually for all volunteers and paid staff who work with Children, Youth, and Vulnerable Adults.

1. RULES AND PROCEDURES FOR ACTIVITIES AND MINISTRY PROGRAMS

1. **2 Adult Rule:** There will be at least two Screened Adults or childcare staff members present (one of which is 18 years or older) whenever Children, Youth or Vulnerable Adults are present except in the case of emergencies. The two Adults should not be related or cohabitating. The 2 Adult Rule must always be considered a best practice; as such, every reasonable effort must be made to comply with this rule.
 - a. **Roamers:** If reasonable efforts have been made to adhere to the 2 Adult Rule, and yet only one Screened Adult is available to supervise Children, Youth, or Vulnerable Adults, the activity will be conducted with the door open (excepting safety issues) and will require an unrelated and non-cohabiting Adult Roamer who will roam the area and give frequent, unannounced visits.
 - b. Alternatively, this activity lacking two Screened Adults could be moved to a public setting where others are likely to walk by.
2. **Clear View Rule:** Any one-on-one sessions or interactions involving Children, Youth or Vulnerable Adults must take place in a public or open setting or in a room with an open door (with a Roamer present or accessible). Alternatively, it could be acceptable to meet behind a closed door with uncovered transparent glass. If possible, these meetings will be scheduled, and known about by supervisors, Parents or another individual responsible for the care of a Child, Student or Vulnerable Adult.
 - a. Any ministry activities held at a Staff or Small Group Leader's home must include proper ratios and supervision by other unrelated, non-cohabiting Screened Adults and the Clear View rule followed.
 - b. If Staff or a leader is invited to a Student's house, the Parent must be home and the Clear View rule followed.

3. Restrooms:

- a. Children may go to the restroom independently if there is a Screened Adult monitoring the hallway.
- b. When it is appropriate for an Adult to assist a Child in using the restroom, the door will remain open.
- c. Youth may go to the restroom at any time with Adult permission.

4. Physical Affection & Gifts

- a. Physical affection must be appropriate to the age of the Child, Youth or Vulnerable Adult. For example, it is generally appropriate for a baby or toddler to be held by an adult, but it is not appropriate for a teenager and their Youth leader to behave this way.
- b. Touching and affection should be a response to the Child, Youth or Vulnerable Adult's need for comfort, encouragement or affection. It should not be initiated or requested by a leader of any age. It is strongly recommended that side hugs, with only one arm be used.
- c. Touching and affection will only be given in the presence of other Adults or Helpers. Personnel must promptly discuss any questionable behavior by other people with their supervisor, ministry leader or pastor. Known or suspected inappropriate touching must be reported to the authorities as outlined in the Abuse and Neglect Reporting Procedures and Response Plan followed by the reporter's chain of command.
- d. No Screened Adults are to give gifts to individual Children, Youth or Vulnerable Adult without the prior knowledge of the Parent(s) or responsible Staff. Because gift giving can be a form of buying loyalty or silence, gift giving will be done on a group basis, or for special occasions only. Gifts should not be elaborate but instead modest and appropriate to the occasion.

5. Screened Adults must be attentive to:

- a. Appropriate use of language and topics of conversation.
- b. When supervising Children, Youth or Vulnerable Adults, Screened Adults will not engage in activities that cause distraction from their primary role of supervising and engaging those in their care. Unless directly used to augment an activity or program, items that cause distractions, particularly technological devices such as cell phones and tablets, should be used sparingly while supervising Children, Youth or Vulnerable Adults. Leaders of Children, Youth and Vulnerable Adult ministries and programs may sign an additional Volunteer or employee behavior covenant which outlines the standards and expectations of behavior.

6. Permission Slips & Medical Release Forms

- a. For on-site events in which Children or Youth are dropped off, at a minimum emergency contact information for the Parent or Responsible Adult and participant allergies will be collected.
- b. Parents or Responsible Adults will also provide specific written permission for each off-site ministry event in which their Children, Youth or Vulnerable Adult participates.

7. Sign-in Procedures & Supervision

- a. A record will be kept of all participants for on-site activities and programs where Screened Adults are responsible for supervising Children.
 - b. Within the Children's Ministry, young Children should be counted frequently. Children, Youth and Vulnerable Adults must be counted before and after movement from one place to another. If transporting Students, a count must be done before departure and upon arrival.
 - c. Parents are to supervise their Children who are not actively participating in a program or activity while on church property and follow these guidelines:
 - i. Children and Youth follow pick up guidelines indicated on the registration form.
 - ii. Youth and Children must be in a scheduled program or under the direct supervision of their Parent at all times. Youth and Children are not permitted to roam the church building or property.
8. **Classroom Climate:** We strive for a pleasant and safe environment for all.
- a. Address issues without shaming or making another person feel unworthy or unloved.
 - b. Redirection is encouraged as the first behavior management technique. Positive reinforcement is also encouraged.
 - c. NO physical discipline is allowed.
 - d. Challenging behaviors should be discussed with the appropriate staff person, either the Pastor or Director of Children or Youth Ministries.
9. **Facilities:** Church facilities will meet reasonable safety standards to reduce risk of harm or injury.
- a. Every classroom door will have a window providing a view of the interior.
 - b. Safety hazards should be reported to Trustees or appropriate staff person.

2. OVERNIGHTS, OUTINGS and TRANSPORTATION PROCEDURES

1. OUTINGS PROCEDURES

- a. A Permission Slip will be required for participants of all off-site events.
- b. Emergency contact information for Screened Adults leading an off-site activity will be provided to Parents or Responsible Adults.

2. OVERNIGHT PROCEDURES

- a. Signed permission slips with emergency contacts must be obtained from a Parent of each Child or Youth and turned in to the Staff member. Handwritten notes are not acceptable.
- b. For overnights that include sleeping:
 - i. Students will have the option to sleep in a boys, girls, or non-gendered/coed sleeping space with at least 2 leaders in each room. Parents will designate which area students will sleep in on the event registration forms.
 - ii. When it is not possible to have a non-gendered sleeping room, students who identify as non-binary, gender-fluid or transgender will have the option to choose

- what sleeping space they feel most comfortable sleeping in.
- iii. An Adult must never share a bed with a Child or Youth.

3. TRANSPORTATION GUIDELINES AND PROCEDURES

- a. All drivers must provide proof of insurance and a driver's license.
- b. All drivers for any church event must be an Adult as defined by this policy. Bethany will never ask a Youth driver to transport other Students.
- c. For transporting groups, copies of the entire group's emergency forms will be in each vehicle or will be available digitally.
- d. Where possible, it is best practice that two non-related, non-cohabiting Screened Adults be placed in each vehicle. If the 2 Adult Rule is not possible, it is advised that the Youth or Screened Adult driver maintain an open communication line with the Child's, Youth's or Vulnerable Adult's Parent or another Screened Adult.
- e. Each occupant of a vehicle must be in their own designated seat and must wear a seatbelt while inside the vehicle.
- f. Drivers will not drive for more than 10 hours per day. Breaks from driving must be taken at least every 3 hours.
- g. No Youth will drive to an out-of-town event under any circumstances.

3. CONSIDERATIONS FOR PERSONS IDENTIFYING AS LGBTQ+

- a. The following are best practices and procedures to allow accommodations to assure that each person is included in our community:
 - i. Creating safe spaces:
 - 1. Make no assumptions about a person's sexual orientation or identity. Identity can be fluid, especially with Children and Youth, so approach each conversation open and unassuming.
 - 2. Do not enforce or reinforce gender stereotypes. Avoid using language that emphasizes a gender binary.
 - 3. An individual's preferred name and pronouns will always be acknowledged and celebrated.
 - 4. Respect an individual's privacy. If an individual shares their sexual orientation or gender identity with you in confidence, honor that confidence by sharing this information only with those who need to know this information to care or minister to them.
 - 5. If a Child or Youth shares their sexual orientation or gender identity privately with you, do not assume others know, including their parents.
 - 6. Be intentional about creating a safe environment and culture by awareness and include in leaders training around homophobic language and bullying. There will be no tolerance for exclusivity or language that is homophobic, bullying, judgmental or dismissive by a Child, Youth, or

Personnel.

4. ONLINE, SOCIAL MEDIA AND OTHER COMMUNICATIONS GUIDELINES

1. Paid Staff will monitor that posts and comments reflect the spirit of the church's ministry on church sites.
2. Staff may post pictures or comments regarding activities involving Children, Youth or Vulnerable Adults in the church's newsletter, website or social media pages with verbal or written permission by the Responsible Adult for those in the picture.

5. OUTSIDE GROUPS

As the safety of Children, Youth, and Vulnerable Adults remains a priority at all times, the following conditions apply.

1. **Agreement to abide by policies.** Outside organizations are required to sign and agree to Bethany Safe Sanctuary policy or provide their policy for approval.
2. **Failure to Comply with Policies** If at any time an outside organization, individual or institution fails to follow the agreed upon Safe Sanctuaries Policies and Procedures, Bethany UMC reserves the right to terminate future use of its facilities to that group or individual.

6. ABUSE REPORTING PROCEDURES AND RESPONSE PLAN

1. **Take it Seriously.** A Child, Youth or Vulnerable Adult's report of abuse must always be taken seriously. Never promise an individual that a private conversation will remain private. Reassure the individual that while the conversation is confidential, to protect them and the individual, outside assistance may be sought.
 - a. If a Volunteer is unsure or uncomfortable reporting the incident themselves, they may talk to the Staff they report to for assistance in reporting an incident to the authorities.
2. **Reporting Procedure**
 - a. **Incident information collection**
 - i. When making a report, specific information about the Child, Youth or Vulnerable Adult will be asked. Collect as much of this information as possible before calling, but do not worry if the information is incomplete:
 1. Name, address, age and sex of the Child, Youth or Vulnerable Adult
 2. Name and address of Parents or other person responsible for care
 3. Nature and extent of the abuse or neglect of the Child, Youth or Vulnerable Adult
 4. Evidence of any previously known or suspected abuse

5. The name, address and relationship, if known, of the person suspected of the abuse
- b. **Report to Legal Authorities**
 - i. Report suspected or known abuse to any one of the agencies listed below:
 1. **Emergency (the Child or Vulnerable Adult may be in immediate danger)**
 - a. Local Police: 911
 2. **Non-Emergency**
 - a. Dane County Department of Human Services office Hours: 608-261-KIDS (5437) After Hours: 608-255-6067
 - b. Adult Protective Services: 608-261-9933
 - c. Madison Metropolitan Police Department: 608-255-2345
- d. **Report to leadership**
 - i. Any Staff or Volunteer who is reporting abuse to the authorities regarding a Child, Youth, or Vulnerable Adult under the church's care must also immediately notify the supervising ministry leader (Director or clergy), excepting those individuals who are suspect in the abuse.
 1. By law, the ministry leader must also make a separate report.
 - ii. Once the ministry leader (Director or clergy) has been notified (excepting those individuals who are suspect in the abuse) and makes their report to the authorities, they will immediately notify the Lead Pastor or designee (excepting those individuals who are suspect in the abuse.)
 - iii. The Lead Pastor or designee will then immediately notify the Responsible Adults (if the Responsible Adults are not suspect) and will respond compassionately with questions and concerns.
 - iv. If a Staff member, including a pastor, is a suspect in the abuse, the Chairperson of the Leadership Board must be notified, who will in turn notify the District Superintendent for an internal investigation. Please note that this is in addition to making an official report to the proper legal authorities.
 - v. After the proper authorities and Executive Pastor or designee (or Board Chair) have been contacted, Bethany UMC will notify the church's insurance company and the District Superintendent.
3. ***Investigation by Qualified Legal Authorities.*** It is not a church Volunteer or Staff person's duty to determine if allegations or suspicions are accurate or true; only the authorities are qualified to investigate. The safety of a Child, Youth or Vulnerable Adult should always take precedence over the unease or doubt of the Personnel who knows of or suspects the abuse.
4. If abuse has occurred or is suspected to have occurred on Bethany property or during a Bethany sponsored program, in addition to adhering to the above external and internal reporting procedures, the following procedures will be followed:
 - a. The immediate safety of any Children, Youth or Vulnerable Adults will be ensured.
 - b. The person in charge of the event or activity will discreetly but immediately suspend and remove the accused or suspected individual from duties involving Children, Youth or Vulnerable Adults pending external and internal investigation.
 - c. The person in charge of the event or activity will complete an Incident Report.

- d. All persons, including Volunteers and Staff, must cooperate fully with any internal and external investigations.
- e. All such matters will be dealt with in the strictest confidence. Any person reporting alleged abuse will refrain from any discussion about the alleged incident with anyone other than the authorities, the leader of the ministry or the Lead Pastor or designee.
- f. Only the Lead Pastor or designee or the District Superintendent will make public comments regarding alleged abuse.

7. CHURCH PARTICIPATION BY THOSE WHO HAVE COMMITTED SEXUAL OFFENSES

- 1. Where a person is known to have committed a sexual offense they will not be permitted to work in direct contact with Children, Youth or Vulnerable Adults

APPROVED Feb 2024