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**PLEASANT GROVE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH**

**SAFE SANCTUARY**

**POLICY AND PROCEDURES**

**Issue 11: August 26, 2021**

**BACKGROUND**

**Introduction**

The 1996 General Conference of The United Methodist Church adopted a resolution stating that “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.” At the 2005 North Carolina Annual Conference of the United Methodist Church a motion was passed that each local church shall develop and implement its own Safe Sanctuaries policy. Pleasant Grove UMC has developed this policy to help prevent any opportunities for the occurrence, or appearance, of abuse of children, youth, and vulnerable adults. This policy is also designed to protect staff members and volunteers from false accusations and suspicions. This policy is based on *Safe Sanctuaries: Reducing the Risk of Abuse in the Church for Children and Youth* by Joy Thornburg Melton, copyright ©2008 Discipleship Resources.

**Spiritual and Doctrinal Context**

The context of this policy is based upon the following quotes:

“As a Christian community of faith, we pledge to conduct the ministry of the Gospel in a manner that assures the safety and spiritual growth of all children and youth and the adults who work with them. We will follow reasonable safety measures in the recruitment and selection of staff. We will implement prudent procedures of operation for all programs and events. We will educate those who work with children and youth in conference and district settings as to the use of all appropriate policies and procedures. We will have a clearly defined procedure for reporting suspected incidents of abuse that conform to the requirements of state law.” Resolution 6, 2005 Session of the North Carolina Annual Conference.

“Those who humble themselves like this little child will be the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. Whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me. As for whoever causes these little ones who believe in me to trip and fall into sin, it would be better for them to have a huge stone hung around their necks and be drowned in the bottom of the lake.” Matthew 18:4-6 (CEB)

“In the same way, my Father who is in heaven doesn’t want to lose one of these little ones.”

Matthew 18:14 (CEB)

“…children must be protected from economic, physical, emotional, and sexual exploitation and abuse.”

¶162 C The Book of Discipline of the United Methodist Church 2012

“With God’s help we will so order our lives after the example of Christ, that this child, surrounded by steadfast love, may be established in the faith, and confirmed and strengthened in the way that leads to life eternal.” The United Methodist Hymnal: Baptismal Covenant 2, page 44.

**Scope**

Unfortunately, it is not uncommon to hear of cases of abuse against children and youth. A frequent factor in these cases is that the abuser is often not only known to the child abused, but in a position of authority and trust. We have a responsibility to minimize the potential for abuse in all church activities and programs, as well as protect adults from false allegations. The Safe Sanctuaries 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 or youth, who participate in any activities or events sponsored by Pleasant Grove UMC, or by other organizations or individuals which occur on property under the control of Pleasant Grove UMC. Examples include but are not limited to programs and activities for youth and children, nursery, transportation, and outreach events.

The Director of Connecting Ministries will be the Safe Sanctuaries Program administrator along with others who the Director designates. The administration includes, but is not limited to:

1. Securely maintaining all files related to the Safe Sanctuaries program
2. Preserving the confidentiality of all aspects of the program
3. Providing training of staff and/or volunteers, and maintaining accountability of volunteers for adhering to the Policy and Procedures
4. Providing communications concerning the Safe Sanctuaries Program to any staff and all volunteers
5. Insuring the implementation of the Policy and Procedures
6. Reevaluating the Policy and Procedures at least once a year

**Definitions**

‘Adult’ means any person 18 years of age or older.

‘Child abuse’ means any non-accidental (or substantial risk of) injury or pattern of injuries to a child inflicted or allowed to be inflicted by a parent, guardian, caretaker, or custodian. Child abuse includes:

1. 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.
2. 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.
3. Emotional abuse – The expressing of attitudes or behaviors by any person toward a child that create serious emotional or psychological damage. Examples include rejecting, isolating, terrorizing, ignoring or corrupting a child on a sustained and repetitive basis.
4. Neglect – Any serious disregard by any person for a child’s supervision, care, or discipline.
5. Ritual – Physical, sexual, or emotional violence in a stylized way.

‘Child or Youth’ means any person under the age of 18.

‘Children’s and youth activities’ means any activity or program in which children are under supervision of persons, staff or volunteers, in charge of these activities.

‘Staff’ means any person employed and paid by the North Carolina Conference of the United Methodist Church.

‘Volunteer’ means any person who assists in a leadership or support role, including parents of the children and youth who participate in any activities or events sponsored by Pleasant Grove UMC, and chaperones of any activities or events sponsored by Pleasant Grove UMC.

‘Persons required to report child abuse’ means any person, who, in the course of their employment or volunteer role with Pleasant Grove UMC comes into contact with children or youth.

‘Vulnerable adult’ means any person over 18 years of age with diagnosed diminished physical, mental or emotional capacities.

‘Unsupervised Interaction’ means an adult volunteer or staff person who volunteers or works at a church sponsored event or program, primarily for children or youth, who would have regular and frequent (more than 4x per year) unsupervised interaction, who supervises adult volunteers who interact with children and youth, or who chaperone children or youth on overnight trips. Examples: youth group leaders, anyone who may be interested in chaperoning an overnight event, Sunday School teachers, Great Minds volunteers, Preschool and nursery staff.

**Indicators of Youth Abuse**

It is important to remember that none of the behavioral or emotional indicators are a definite sign that a child is being abused. Instead, you should think of them as red flags, a sign that something in the child’s life has created enough stress to change their behavior.

* Depression
* Low self-esteem
* Suicidal tendencies, threatening, or attempting suicide
* Extreme passive/aggressive behaviors
* Eating, sleeping, or habit (biting, rocking, head banging) disorders
* Fearfulness of parents, ministers (or someone wearing a robe), and other adults
* Burns, facial injuries, pattern of repetitious bruises, difficulty walking or sitting
* Signs of sexual behavior inappropriate to the age or development of the child
* Anxiety
* Inappropriate dress for climate, begging or stealing food/constant hunger, poor hygiene, untreated medical conditions
* Mood swings, easily agitated, defensive
* Going to extremes to seek adult approval
* Disruptions of memory or consciousness, flashbacks
* Fear of the dark

**Who Are the Abusers?**

More often than not the abusers are familiar adults who are in a position of authority and trusted by the children and youth. Less than 10% of all abuse is perpetrated by strangers. In more than 90% of all reported incidents of abuse, the victim is related to or acquainted with the abuser. In more than 90% of sexual abuse cases the child and the child’s family know and trust the abuser.

Abusers come from all segments of society and can be found in every racial, ethnic, economic, and social group. Within churches, abusers may be Sunday school teachers, camp counselors, youth group counselors, clergy, or anyone else with unlimited and unsupervised access to children and youth.

**How Does Abuse Happen?**

Abuse (sexual, physical, and emotional) happens when a person exerts his or her power or authority over children or youth in ways that harms and/or exploits them. The abuser can be in a position of power due to size, position, knowledge, money, etc. The victim is generally smaller and weaker and may be dependent on the abuser.

Activities and programs should be designed to minimize the potential for isolating children and teens with an adult leader, thereby providing an opportunity for adults to demand secrecy. A comprehensive strategy to prevent abuse protects children and youth as well as the people who work with them.

Prevention policies and procedures should apply to all categories of people who work with children and youth, paid or voluntary, and must be supported by the vast majority of church members. No one should be exempt.

**POLICIES**

**Procedures**

In order to provide as safe and secure an environment as possible for our ministry participants, and to minimize staff persons and volunteers vulnerability to unwarranted accusation, we adopt the following procedures:

***Screening:***

1. As a condition of employment, all employees of the North Carolina Conference of the United Methodist Church, both lay and clergy, will be required to sign the necessary forms and consent to a criminal history and background investigation.
2. All volunteers must be approved by the Director of Connecting Ministries before being permitted to work directly with children or youth. All adult volunteers with unsupervised interaction will be required to sign the necessary forms and consent to a criminal history and background investigation. It is the responsibility of the Director of Connecting Ministries to screen and equip volunteers.
3. Once the necessary forms and consent for background investigations are completed and signed a criminal history and background investigation will be performed on that individual.
4. All volunteers will receive appropriate training on the policy and procedures associated with Safe Sanctuaries.
5. Any person who may pose a threat to children or youth will be prohibited from working with children and youth. Convictions that will prohibit a volunteer from working with children or youth are child abuse, child molestation, incest, any crime against a child or teenager that was committed as an adult, history of other violent crimes, and name on Sex Offender registry.

If information indicates that charges were filed against the employee/volunteer applicant but there was no conviction, PGUMC will investigate how the issue was resolved. The police department or prosecuting attorney’s office will be contacted to discover more of the details. When all the information has been gathered, the minister and Director of Connecting Ministries will decide if the applicant poses too great a risk to the youth/children. The applicant file will contain documentation of all the information gathered. This step is important because many perpetrators of crimes against children do not end up with an actual conviction, however there may be a pattern of charges that eventually are dismissed due to the family’s unwillingness to pursue litigation or the inability of the child to testify.

Other questionable convictions (i.e. reckless driving, illegal drugs, driving while impaired, and shoplifting) will be evaluated by the minister and/or the appropriate chairperson. Length of time since the conviction, age at conviction and circumstances may be taken into consideration. It also may be appropriate to discuss the findings with the applicant before the decision is made regarding whether the applicant will be able to fill the volunteer position.

1. The results of the criminal history and background investigation will be kept confidential and maintained by the Safe Sanctuaries Program administrator. The Director of Connecting Ministries, with the supervision of the Senior Pastor, will make the decision on allowing any volunteer to participate due to the information received from the criminal history and background investigation. The background report will only be shared with designated staff (Senior Pastor, Preschool Director (only for Preschool staff), SPRC Chairperson (only for staff)) or volunteer if it reveals a history that is inconsistent with filling the position applied for by the volunteer.
2. If Director of Connecting Ministries and Senior Pastor feel that a volunteer’s history puts our children/youth/vulnerable adults at risk and is asked to not volunteer, the volunteer can choose to appeal to the Administrative Council for a decision. If asking for an appeal, the volunteer is relinquishing their criminal history and background check to members of the Administrative Council for decision making.
3. Criminal background checks will be run by an independent company every 5 years for staff and every 3 years for volunteers, and in addition, the NC Sex Offender Registry (http://sexoffender.ncsbi.gov/search.aspx) and National Sex Offender Registry (<http://www.nsopr.gov/>) will be checked. The NC Sex Offender Registry will be checked annually for staff and volunteers who have unsupervised interactions with children, youth, and vulnerable adults.

***General Supervision Guidelines:***

1. The Two-Adult Rule: Simply stated, the "Two-Adult rule" requires that, whenever possible, no fewer than two adults be present at all times during any church sponsored program, event, or ministry involving children and youth. Workers should take every precaution to never be alone with a child or youth in inaccessible areas. It is recommended that where it is impossible to staff two adults in every room that an additional adult serve as a floater with visual and physical access to all areas.
2. If volunteers are husband and wife they only count as one for the Two Adult-Rule.
3. Whenever possible, each room set aside for children and youth should have a door with a window in it or a half door. If this is not possible, the door should remain partially open.
4. At counseling sessions with children or youth, the door of the room used should remain open for the entire session.
5. There must be at least five (5) years difference in age between the eldest child/youth and the leader(s).
6. Youth, age fourteen to eighteen, will be allowed to provide childcare for church events with adult supervision. No youth under the age of 18 shall be allowed to provide childcare where adults are not on the same premises.
7. A basic rule for ministry with children and youth is to always give the parents advance notice and full information regarding the event(s) in which their children will be participating. Full information includes contact information for adult in charge, general schedule overview, address of overnight accommodations (if applicable), and general layout of overnight accommodations (if applicable).
8. For any off-site event, the trip’s leader must obtain medical information and liability release forms for all participants and have them in possession.
9. Volunteers must have been active participants at PGUMC for six (6) months before they will be eligible to serve in areas of unsupervised interactions. Persons not meeting this requirement may serve only as an assistant with another adult and never be left alone. The Youth Council, along with the Administrative Council holds the right to handle exceptions when necessary.
10. Childcare is provided for on-site sanctioned church functions for those parents who are participating in those functions. The parent(s) must be on-site at all times, or designate an adult (eighteen years or older) to be responsible for their children. Nursery staff must be notified, and contact information must be provided on the sign-in log.
11. Street crossing should be kept to a minimum and avoided as much as possible. One adult needs to be in front of the children/youth and one adult needs to be behind children/youth if it is necessary to walk across the street.

***Supervision Specific to Transportation:***

1. Every effort should be taken to ensure more than one adult and one child in a vehicle. Exceptions ONLY during emergencies.
2. When having a youth event off church property, youth may drive themselves to and from the event with the understanding that parents/guardians are responsible for youth that transport themselves. If meeting at the church first, and then going off campus, youth may not drive themselves or others to and from the event.
3. Follow the guidance provided by the Board of Trustees regarding those allowed to operate church vehicles, including rented vehicles used for church activities. Drivers must have a DMV background check. Leaders are expected to leave the vehicle in a clean and safe manner, following the Board of Trustees guidelines.

***Supervision Specific to Quest (3rd-5th grade youth group):***

1. Children should be signed in and signed out of Quest activities by a parent or guardian.
2. Parents, guardians, designated adults, or siblings 18 years of age and older may sign the child out following Quest activities.

***Supervision Specific to Nursery:***

1. Childcare is only for individuals while they are involved in church activities on campus. Standard activities include: worship services, committee meetings upon request, and adult music programs upon request.
2. Additional nursery requests should be directed to PGUMC’s Director of Connecting Ministries, Ashley Yohman (ashley.yohman@pgumc.org)
3. Children should be signed in and signed out by parent or guardian when entering and leaving the nursery.
4. There must be two paid adult nursery workers present at all times in the nursery.
5. See separate Nursery Procedures for more nursery specifics.

***Supervision Specific to Children’s Church:***

1. Following the children’s sermon, the adult leader should meet all the children by the right side door and wait until all children are present before heading to the Children’s Church classroom.
2. A parent or guardian should sign out their child before the child is dismissed from Children’s Church.
3. If both adults are related or married, the door must remain open at all times.
4. Weather permitting, children may play on the playground as long as two adults are present.

***Supervision Specific to Overnight Trips:***

1. Strongly recommend that at least (2) leaders are present in every room where possible during activities.
2. Strongly recommend using a housing option over hotel option when possible. Hotels opening to an interior hallway should be utilized if choosing the hotel option.
3. When staying in a hotel, if it is necessary for leaders to share a room with children/youth to provide youth supervision, leaders shall sleep in separate beds from children/youth so long as any one leader is not alone with any one child/youth. Exception: Recognizing accommodations may be restrictive in some cases, a child/youth may share sleeping accommodations ONLY when the child/youth is the child/youth of a leader(s).
4. Rooms should be assigned with at least three children/youth per room. If needed, at least two children/youth will be allowed.
5. When possible, assignments should be made so that an adult room is between two children/youth rooms.
6. Consult any transgender child/youth on where they would like to room.
7. Youth should be separated in overnight accommodations by their biological gender. Consult any transgender child/youth on where they would like to room. When unavoidable, care shall be placed on separating biological genders if in the same room. Exception: If parent and child with different genders room together.
8. There will be at least one screened adult for each gender present at co-ed overnight events. If only one gender present, then two adults is required.

***Restroom Guidelines:***

Infant and Toddler: Unless there is an emergency, paid staff should be the only ones changing diapers or assisting with bathroom trips. Diapers should be changed in the bathroom.

Preschool: An adult leader should accompany preschool children to the restroom. Leave the bathroom door open, but allow the child to enter stall alone. Stand in doorway of bathroom or outside the stall and offer assistance if needed.

Younger Elementary (Kindergarten-2nd Grade): An adult leader should accompany younger elementary children to the restroom (if bathroom is visually in sight, teacher can stand in their classroom door and watch the restroom). Allow the child to enter the bathroom alone. Wait outside the bathroom door for the child unless assistance is needed.

Older Elementary (3rd-5th Grade): Children in older elementary may go to the bathroom without an adult leader. Leaders should watch their classroom door until the student returns to class.

Persons who identify as gay lesbian, or bisexual are to use the restroom of their biological gender. Any child/youth identifying as gender-fluid or transgender are able to use the restroom of their preferred gender.

***Appropriate Physical and Emotional Boundaries:***

Physical boundaries are most important in dealing with children and youth. Persons working with children and youth have to understand and respect those boundaries. Obviously, these boundaries change as children grow older. A young child sitting in the lap of a caregiver is most appropriate, whereas an older child or youth sitting in a leader’s lap would not be acceptable.

Emotional boundaries are also important. As a child grows older it is important for the leader to maintain appropriate boundaries in relationships. It is important for those working with children and youth to not step outside of those lines and allow the younger person to become too attached to them. It is important for the older person to be careful where conversations might lead and to steer clear of inappropriate talk. When a leader recognizes that there might be an issue with these boundaries, greater space should be allowed to come between them and the child or youth in question. If that does not solve the problem, then the Children’s and Youth Council should address the issue.

If you have further questions regarding physical and emotional boundaries, contact Jay Minnick, jay.minnick@pgumc.org, for more information.

***Appropriate Discipline:***

Children and youth should be made aware that appropriate behavior is expected at all events. Gentle reminders are always necessary when dealing with children and youth. When these reminders don’t work, the discipline needs to move to the next step. In cases where behavior has to be addressed, leaders, in consultation with parents and the minister where necessary, should address the issue.

In NO CASE is physical discipline an appropriate measure to deal with problems. A reasonable response might include a period of “time-out” for the child or temporary removal from the program for youth.

Keeping parents involved is important. They need to be kept up to date on their child’s behavior. For serious offenses, at the discretion of the leader, the appropriate response will be to send the child or youth home immediately.

***Responding to Allegations and Incidents of Abuse:***

When a report or allegation of abuse against a person who has been trusted with the care and nurture of the children and youth of the congregation occurs, the congregation is immediately thrust into a crisis situation. Consequently, the most appropriate response is one that has been planned in advance. By careful and thoughtful planning, the congregation will be able to provide the level of care and support necessary for all involved while also cooperating, as necessary, with local authorities.

It is desirable that church staff and volunteers are educated and trained so that they are fully aware of their responsibilities under state law, in addition to the prevention policies of Pleasant Grove United Methodist Church.

State Reporting Requirements

*Who must report abuse and neglect?*

North Carolina General Statute (§7B-301) requires that any person or institution that has cause to suspect any child is abused, neglected, or has died because of maltreatment must make a report to the Department of Social Services in the county where the child resides or is found.

* Suspect means that you have a good reason to believe the child may be abused or neglected.
* Suspect means you have seen signs of abuse or neglect or the child has made statements to you.
* Reasonable cause means that a reasonable person in a like and similar situation would have suspected that the child was abused or neglected.
* A suspicion is more than a gut feeling – it may involve recognition of certain behaviors or physical signs of abuse or neglect or direct knowledge of the abuse.

*Criminal and Civil Immunity*

North Carolina General Statute (§7B-309) states that anyone who makes a report or testifies in any judicial proceeding or investigation is immune from any civil or criminal liability provided the person making the report acted in good faith.

* Immunity means that if you make a report in good faith (without malice), no one can bring civil or criminal charges against you.
* Immunity is provided for anyone who cooperates or testifies in a court action.

*Whose conduct is covered?*

North Carolina Juvenile Code (the laws and procedures that the child protective services system is based on) defines abused and neglected children in terms of the effect on children of the conduct or caretaking abilities of parents, guardians, custodians, or caretakers. The definition does not cover teachers, coaches, Sunday school teachers and others with similar temporary care-taking responsibilities for children. In other words, if someone suspects that one of these “non-caretakers” has harmed or neglected a child or placed a child at risk, the law does not require that person to make a report to the department of social services. Still, most people can and should take steps to ensure that the child and other children are not exposed to further risk of harm. Appropriate responses include:

* notifying the child’s parents, guardian, custodian; and/or
* contacting law enforcement authorities.

If a person does report a problem involving a non-caretaker to a county department of social services, the department will not investigate, since it is not authorized to do so. The law, however, requires the department to relay the information to the district attorney’s office and to law enforcement officials if the report describes criminal conduct that results in harm to a child.

Obligations Beyond State Requirements

We must also be prepared to respond to others regarding allegations of abuse: the victim, the victim’s family, the governing structure of the United Methodist Church, the alleged perpetrator, and possibly the news media.

*The Victim and Family*

The safety and well-being of the child/youth must be the church’s primary concern. The child’s parents must be notified immediately (if the parent was not involved in disclosing the allegations of abuse). The church should advise the victim and the family of their right to make a report to law enforcement and support this right - this includes taking the allegation seriously and respecting the victim’s privacy. The church must commit to ensuring that assistance is provided to allow for healing and reconciliation, both for emotional and spiritual well-being. This may include provision of counseling, spiritual assistance, support groups, and other social services that may be requested by the victim or the family.

*Conference of the United Methodist Church*

The response to the annual conference will include notifying conference authorities (the church’s district superintendent or the resident bishop) as soon as allegations of abuse are received. Conference authorities must be kept aware of the congregation’s actions throughout the process, up to and including the final resolution of the situation. The church must also keep a written record of the steps the church has taken in response to the allegations. It will also be necessary to notify the church’s insurance agent if an allegation of abuse is made.

*The Alleged Perpetrator*

The first step that must be taken is to remove the accused from his/her position as a worker with youth until the allegations are fully investigated and resolved. It is also important that the alleged perpetrator is not confronted with anger and hostility, but treated with dignity and respect. If after the incident has been fully investigated and the alleged perpetrator is found guilty or confesses, the church should hold the perpetrator accountable for the acts committed. Faithful response does not include forgiving the perpetrator before justice is achieved and the victim is ready to consider whether forgiveness is appropriate or not.

*News Media*

Pleasant Grove United Methodist Church will designate a spokesperson for the church on behalf of the congregation. The designated spokesperson must be prepared to state Pleasant Grove’s prevention policy, the concern for the safety of the victim and all youth, and the procedures the church has followed. The designated spokesperson should *never* make any statements indicating the church does not take the allegation seriously or suspects the allegation is not true. The person chosen must be capable of speaking calmly and thoughtfully in front of cameras and microphones. Best practice would include the use of a prepared statement. The spokesperson should also be prepared to answer questions honestly, without adding extra or unnecessary information.

***Post Abuse Ministry:***

When abuse of a youth occurs, there may be many victims in addition to the one who has been physically harmed. The other victims may include:

* Family members of the youth that was abused
* Other youth in the congregation
* Parents
* Remaining youth workers
* Family of the accused abuser
* The whole congregation

After abuse is experienced steps should be taken to minister to those affected by the abuse and to restore confidence in the ability of the church to protect the youth of the church. At Pleasant Grove the Administrative Council will lead this work. Steps that must be considered include

* It is important that the facts be given to the congregation. This can be accomplished with
	+ A letter the congregation explaining the incident and the actions taken or to be taken by the church. The letter should not include the name of the abused or accused.
	+ A congregational meeting explaining the incident and the actions taken or to be taken by the church. Again this should not include the name of the abused or accused. This meeting shall be announced ahead of time so that people can make a choice to attend. This should not be tacked on to a worship service or other church meeting. The meeting needs to be carefully planned. The pastor will be the leader of the meeting unless he or she is the accused abuser. The following people should be considered for the leadership team for the meeting
		- Lay leaders
		- Representatives from the annual conference such as the district superintendent
		- A qualified counselor who is not a member of the congregation

The agenda for the meeting should include fact sharing and moments of reflection and worship.

* After some time has passed the Administrative Council may want to organize another congregational meeting to assess how much healing and recovery has occurred and to identify any remaining needs that should be addressed.

The Administrative Council should review these Safe Sanctuary policies and procedures and make any changes based on what was learned from this incident.

**SOCIAL MEDIA/COMMUNICATIONS**

**Introduction**

As an ever-increasing number of people use and prefer digital communication over other forms, it is essential that the church be present in this mission field. Social networking sites, on-the-spot communication devices and email can enhance communication, faith sharing and deepen relationships. The following recommended practices and guidelines apply principles of healthy boundaries and safe church to the virtual world of digital networking and communication. They are intended to raise awareness of issues and open doors of conversations with ministry teams. We encourage all ministry teams to discern together the following guidelines, considering the nature of your ministry and being mindful that our calling is to meet children and youth where they are; model healthy boundaries; and love and care for them safely. Adults engaged in ministry to youth and children should consider their relationship with the youth or child when interacting with them using digital media, and should conduct themselves in a manner that would be acceptable on church grounds.

**Connecting on Social Networking Sites**

In addition to participating on the ministry pages, youth may wish to establish social media connections with church leaders and adult volunteers engaged in youth ministry. Adults who are willing to participate in these relationships should use the following guidelines when establishing these connections:

1. Adults should not submit ‘friend’ or ‘follow’ requests to children or youth. Minors may feel like they are not able to decline such requests due to the disparity of power between them and adults. Exceptions to this rule should only be made in situations when the adult’s privacy settings make it difficult or impossible for the youth to find the adult’s page on the site. In these circumstances, it is acceptable for an adult to request a youth as a friend, if the youth has requested that they do so. If accepting ‘friend’ or ‘follow’ requests of one youth/child, all requests must be accepted.
2. Due to the greater potential for misinterpretation, inappropriate discussions, and inadvertent exposure of youth to inappropriate content; personal pages should be maintained appropriately.
3. Church leaders and adult volunteers should avoid relationships with children/youth via Social Networking sites, unless an actual relationship (ministry (ex: youth leader, small group leader, Sunday school teachers, etc.), family relationship, family friendship, etc.) already exists between them.  If connections have been made prior to September 2019 through ministries of the church, those connections can remain.

Boundaries

1. All church leaders and adult volunteers engaged in ministry with children and youth are strongly encouraged to set strict privacy settings on any personal social networking profile, making every effort to prevent youth and children from being introduced to objectionable content. Privacy settings on personal pages and information should be thoroughly scrutinized on a regular basis to prevent this information from being available to minors. In the event that a church leader or adult volunteer does not feel that they can set the proper privacy settings and/or regularly check their personal pages (2-3 times per day) for inappropriate material that might have been posted by others, they are asked to completely restrict child/youth access to their pages.
2. For the sake of their own privacy and the well-being of the child/youth participants, church leaders and adult volunteers should not add or invite children or youth to any groups, events, pages, chat rooms, etc. that are not solely dedicated to activities directly related to the children or youth ministries or ministry activities.
3. Given the continuing evolution of privacy settings and capabilities on many social networking sites, church leaders and adult volunteers must be willing to continue to educate themselves on what settings are needed to support the above recommendations. Additionally, the child and youth ministry programs should establish education for adult volunteers who wish to use social media as part of their ministry efforts.

**Communication**
Social media is an excellent way to quickly share both good and sad moments in a person’s life with a large number of people. However, as with all forms of communication, users should be respectful of the privacy of others. This is particularly the case with youth and children’s ministry leaders. Leaders should be especially mindful of how information is presented in such a permanent medium, and should never share news about another person without their express prior consent.

1. Use prudent judgment in the time you contact youth and children through social media, e-mail or other forms of digital communication. The "home phone rule" is a basic rule of thumb to use – not text or chat with youth at a time you would not normally call their home phone line, i.e. before 9:00 AM or after 9:00 PM. Exceptions to this rule are as follows:
* In emergency situations
* When children or youth reach out to a church leader or adult volunteer with issues that they feel they need to discuss immediately

1. All church leaders and adult volunteers engaged in ministry with children and youth should consider the content and nature of any posts that will be seen or read by others. Your voice is often considered the voice of the church.
2. ‘One on One’ texting with youth/children is generally not appropriate unless an actual relationship (ministry (ex: youth leader, small group leader, Sunday school teachers, etc.), family relationship, family friendship, etc.) already exists between them.  Church leaders and adult volunteers should, where applicable, utilize the Remind Application when texting with youth/children. If necessary to text only one child for specific requests, it is required that Church leaders and adult volunteers carbon copy other leaders or church staff on all text communications.
3. Church leaders and adult volunteers should avoid direct communication with children/youth via phone calls, text, facetime, etc. unless an actual relationship (ministry (ex: youth leader, small group leader, Sunday school teachers, etc.), family relationship, family friendship, etc.) already exists between them.
4. When the content of received communications raises concerns or questions, it should be shared with a member of the Pastoral team, and law enforcement, where appropriate.
* Email is not an appropriate communication method for matters that are pastorally sensitive, emotionally charged, or that require extensive conversation.
* Email may be more appropriate where matters are deemed legally sensitive.
* Humor and sarcasm can be easily misinterpreted, and should be used only where appropriate. All communication sent digitally (email, social networking sites, notes or posts, etc.) may be shared or reposted to others. Adults should be mindful that comments sent to a youth may be shared by that youth in a number of ways and that misinterpretation of those comments may occur.

**Identity Protection**

We will seek to protect the privacy and identity of all minors in our use of social media. All church leaders and adult leaders in youth and children’s ministry should closely monitor the privacy settings of any posted youth images to ensure the safety of our children/youth.

1. All church leaders and adult volunteers engaged in ministry with minors must not post photos or video that identify children or youth on any online site or printed publication without the written consent from a parent or legal guardian.
2. Even with the written consent from a parent or legal guardian, pictures should be posted to either PGUMC sponsored events/web pages and names should be avoided.
3. We strongly encourage the respect and dignity of every person depicted in an image. Only pictures depicting youth in an appropriate light should be posted. “Appropriate” pictures may include goofy pictures that the youth’s parents are comfortable being posted. If a picture would make the youth feel self-conscious, vulnerable, or would subject the youth to ridicule, the picture should not be posted.
4. When checking in with any location tagging social media, only check in yourself. Never check in minors. Be sensitive to tagging or revealing other participants’ locations.

**Administration of Official PGUMC Social Media Groups**

1. Each church related social media site, group or page must have a minimum of two unrelated administrators, who are either church leaders or adult volunteers engaged in the ministry.  For PGUMC, the communications committee will have this oversight and should be notified of the login and password for any church related social media site, group or page.
2. Sites must be monitored frequently to allow for quick responses in the event urgent or crisis concerns are posted.

**Implementation Strategies:**

Task 1: Research

Research issues relative to abuse of youth including:

- Definitions and types of abuse

- Statistics of the frequency of abuse

- Review the places and settings in which abuses could occur in the congregation.

- Consider who are the most likely to be victims

- Characteristics of typical abusers

- Typical reactions of abusers

- Consequences of abuse in the church.

Task 2: Evaluation

Evaluate current practices of the church related to the care and supervision of youth. Explore circumstances and situations that could make it easier for an abuser to hurt a youth including:

- Recruiting and screening policies and practices for hiring workers with youth.

- Adequacy of supervision and control of workers.

- Ministry settings.

- Observations and evaluations of workers including volunteers

- Identify current policies and practices, written or otherwise.

- Review current policies regarding the recruiting and screening of workers (paid and volunteers), lay and clergy.

-Review current policies related to training workers regarding abuse and how allegations and/or incidents are reported.

Task 3: Develop New Policies and Procedures for the Care and Supervision of Youth

Integrate what has been learned about abuse and the current circumstances in the congregation. The following needs to be considered:

- Recruiting and screening practices.

- Applications.

- References.

- Disclosure forms

- Background checks/consent forms

- Covenant statements

- Use of appropriate facilities for ministries with youth.

- Appropriate types of discipline for youth.

Task 4: Training

All group leaders, and the congregation at large, should have a general understanding of the PGUMC Safe Sanctuary policy and procedures as defined in this document. Leaders of groups which include workers with children and/or youth (paid or volunteer) are responsible to become knowledgeable with the specific provisions of this document as they pertain to the functions of their groups. The leaders are responsible for training all workers in their groups in their responsibilities to insure compliance with the requirements of this document. Ongoing training must be provided as conditions and/or personnel in the groups change.

Records must be maintained of training provided, personnel trained, dates, initial or refresher training, etc, in order to demonstrate that training has been provided. Evidence of training demonstrates a proactive approach to prevention or minimization of the potential for abuse. This would also be a positive factor in the unlikely event of an abuse case reaching a court of law.

**Document Control:**

Safe Sanctuary Policies and Procedures will be under document control and regular review (at least annually), and updated as necessary. A record of changes is recorded below. A formal distribution list will be maintained for key groups and individuals who will receive updates automatically. Other interested parties may obtain copies upon request but will not be included in the automatic distribution of updates. This document will be available on the church web site.

**Document Control Record:**

Issue Date \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_Record of changes\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Issue 1 3-12-07 Initial issue

Issue 2 5-1-07 Sections 7 & 14 –Background checks of volunteers reassigned

 Section 8 – “Whenever possible” added to 2 adult rule

Miscellaneous minor changes

Issue 3 12-9-07 Changes made to include Program Director and Volunteer

 Coordinator

Issue 4 1-23-12 Expanded to include vulnerable adults, specified

background checks every 3 or 5 years, six month restriction on

 new participants revised, general updates.

Issue 5 6-24-12 Expanded to address parent(s) off site and needing childcare.

Issue 6 4-12-15 Created a condensed version for Safe Sanctuary training adding

 specific areas of supervision for Quest, Children’s Church, and
 nursery.

Issue 7 11-9-16 Converted complete Safe Sanctuary policy into a more condensed
 version, primarily removing the personal interview and application
 process for volunteers.

Issue 8 8-30-17 Removed Director of Family Ministries from policy, updated
 statistics, added clause about crossing the street

Issue 9 8-8-19 Added Social Media and Communications policies, updated overnight

 trip policies

Issue 10 10-10-19 Added Restroom Guidelines to policy

Issue 11 8-26-21 Updated restroom and overnight policies to include transgender and
 gender-fluid persons.

**NOTE:** The issue number will be raised by one for each update, along with the date of issue, and a very brief description of the changes provided under “Record of Changes”. For reviews not requiring an update, show the date of the review and “no changes required” shown under “Record of Changes”.

**Distribution List:**

Senior Pastor

Administrative Council – All members

Staff Parish Relations Committee - Chairperson

Preschool Director
Director of Connecting Ministries

Youth Council/Leaders

Greatminds Coordinator