

# SAFE SANCTUARIES

Reducing the Risk of Abuse in the Church for Children and Youth



## **Succasunna United Methodist Church Safe Sanctuaries Policy**

**Last updated: 8/21/2025 (proposed)**

**Approved by Church Council: 10/31/2025**

**Next Review / Revision Due: Fourth Quarter 2026 (and annually thereafter)**

## **Part One: Screening and Selection of Workers with Children and Vulnerable Adults**

### **1. All future employees of Succasunna United Methodist Church must:**

- Complete an application for employment (with three references).
- Undergo an interview with the Pastor and the Staff–Parish Relations Committee.
- Undergo a background check utilizing a Greater New Jersey (GNJ) Annual Conference–approved vendor arranged by the church; results shared with the Staff Parish Relations Committee and retained in confidential church files.

### **2. All current paid staff and volunteers will be required to:**

- Undergo a background check utilizing a GNJ-approved vendor arranged by the church; *recertification everythree (3) years.*

### **3. All current staff and volunteers working with children, youth, and vulnerable adults must:**

- Be a member of this congregation, a regular attendee of this congregation for at least six consecutive months, or if not a member/regular attendee, provide two written letters of recommendation from SUMC members and receive Education Committee approval.
- Undergo a background check utilizing a GNJ-approved vendor arranged by the church and attend SUMC Safe Sanctuary training; results on file with the Pastor or Safe Sanctuaries Coordinator.
- If a prior background check was completed (e.g., for school teachers and others who work with children) submit documentation; if older than three (3) years, a new screening is required.
- Volunteers must complete initial training and a brief annual refresher; background check recertification every three (3) years.

### **4. For non–US citizens, or in other cases where a background check is prohibitively expensive or impractical to obtain, two written recommendations from SUMC members are required, plus Education Committee approval.**

### **5. The church will reimburse the cost of the GNJ-approved background check (currently Trak-1), billed directly to SUMC.**

### **6. These files will be maintained in the confidential files of the church. Safe Sanctuaries Coordinator or Pastor will review records quarterly to ensure credentials and training are current. Retention: background checks, applications, and training attestations retained for at least seven (7) years after service ends.**

## **Part Two: Supervision and Procedures**

### **Two Certified Adult Rule**

Certified adults are defined as those individuals age 18 or older who have met the requirements for training and background checks under our policy. At least two certified adults, (who must be non-related and not cohabiting), shall be present everywhere children, youth and vulnerable adults are gathered for worship, education, games, recreation, arts & crafts, and other activities. This includes church school classes, youth programs, Vacation Bible School, online Zoom sessions and any other activities where children, youth, and vulnerable adults (see the below section on vulnerable adults) are present, whether these activities take place on-site or off-site.

The nursery can be utilized by the parent or guardian without the presence of two certified adults during worship services and Fellowship Hour.

Line-of-Sight & Rooms: Doors have windows or remain ajar. No one-on-one meetings behind closed doors: No unrelated adult should be alone on church property with a child, youth, or vulnerable adult for any reason at any time.

### **Age Requirements**

All counselors, mentors and volunteers age 18 or older must be Safe Sanctuary Certified. All counselors, mentors and volunteers working with high school age youth must be at least 22 years old.

### **Bathroom Procedure**

Young children (grade 2 or younger) or vulnerable adults who need assistance in using the bathroom shall be escorted by a certified adult. The certified adult is to remain in the hallway with the bathroom door open while the child is in the bathroom stall. If assistance is requested by the child, then the certified adult may enter and give assistance. At the end of church school or any other activity, the parent or guardian will be informed that bathroom assistance was requested by the child and provided by a certified adult.

### **Church School & Youth Group Arrival/Dismissal**

Students Pre-K–4th grade must not be dropped off and left by their parent/guardian unless 2 certified adult teachers are present in the room. Students in the Pre-K/K class must be signed in upon drop off. At the time of dismissal, students Pre-K–4th grade will not be allowed to leave until their parents/guardians pick them up from the classroom. Students 5th grade and up should not leave the church building without a parent/guardian. Parents/guardians of students 5th grade and up should agree on a designated pickup/meeting area.

### **Confirmation Mentors, Youth Leaders and Teachers**

- All mentors, youth leaders and teachers must receive the required training for Safe Sanctuary Certification, and they must undergo a background check.
- No unrelated adult should be alone with a child or youth for any reason. This includes the car while going to and from meetings.

- One-on-one meetings must be held only in public places (library, coffee shop, restaurant, fellowship hall when others are present, etc). No private homes unless a parent or another unrelated certified adult is present. Arrange for the PARENTS to drop off & pick up the youth for the meeting.
- Mentors may pair up with another mentor/confirmand team. Arrange for the PARENTS to drop off & pick up the youth or if necessary one of the mentors could pick up the other mentor THEN the two confirmands being sure to drop the youths off first while both mentors are still present.
- When volunteering with youth, there must be written permission from the youth's parents to contact the youth directly via cell phone or email (ie. Confirmation Mentors). If permission is not granted, contact with the youth should only be made through the parents of the youth to protect the youth's privacy. When youth are attending an overnight trip, contact via cell phone is mandatory and permission is granted when allowing the youth to attend the event.
- Direct communication from the Youth Director, Middle School Sunday School teachers and/or High School Sunday School teachers with a youth via email or text requires annual parent/guardian consent. These messages (i.e.. Inspirational messages, devotions, upcoming events) should be intended for a group audience but understand that one-on-one conversations take place. Two-adult digital rule: copy another certified adult (or a parent) on all direct texts/emails/DMs with youth; no disappearing messages. If no consent is given for the youth to receive messages directly, the youth's parents will be included in all communications.

Records: Retain electronic communications logs for two (2) years per retention policy.

### **Discipline & Physical Contact**

No corporal punishment, shaming, or derogatory language. Appropriate contact is brief and public (e.g., side-hugs, high-fives). No lap sitting (except toddlers with their own parent/guardian), tickling, or wrestling. Respect any request for no touch.

### **Medical & Allergy Procedures**

Parents must complete medical/allergy forms for events. Only trained adults may assist with emergency medications (e.g., EpiPen) with written authorization. First-aid kits and incident report forms are available in program areas.

### **Nursery**

- The nursery will be available for children ages 4 and under when accompanied by their parent/guardian.
- The nursery will be unlocked during both worship services and Fellowship Hour for the convenience of the parent/guardian accompanying the child. Worship services may be video streamed in the nursery for parent/guardian viewing.
- Diapering: Only by the child's own parent/guardian.

## **Trips**

- A parental consent form must be completed for all church related trips/events (e.g., Youth Group Events, Confirmation trips), with appropriate medical information provided.
- All drivers must be at least 22 years of age and be Safe Sanctuaries certified. The driver must provide evidence of a valid driver's license and insurance at the time of a trip or event. This information will be checked by the trip/event organizer.
- Two certified adults per vehicle should be present in the vehicle. When only one certified adult is in a vehicle, parents/guardians must be notified in writing in advance; the adult drives, youth ride in rear seats only (the youth of the parent can sit in the front seat). This information must be included on the trip permission slip form.
- Trip forms/rosters/medical forms retained for ten (10) years, or for minors until age 28, whichever is later.

Additional safety: Seat belts for every rider; no texting/calls by drivers; youth may not drive other youth.

## **Overnight Trips (Sleeping Accommodations)**

- These guidelines are in addition to the guidelines listed under "Trips."
- Trips requiring overnight travel use lodging that provides safe, appropriate bed space per participant. In a hotel room and a home there must be one bed available for each youth. (Rooms must be gender specific /or any transgender youth should have separate rooms). ). If the stay is in a facility with bunkbeds they must still be gender specific. For example, if staying in a hotel room with two beds the room can only house two same sex youth. If staying in a home with 6 beds the home may only house 6 people. (Exceptions apply.) When privacy is requested, provide a single room or a room with a private bed/space.
- Adults may not share rooms with unrelated youth; adults room with adults in nearby rooms. Adults may share a room with another adult of the same sex.
- If staying in a hotel adults should have a key to every room a youth is occupying. If staying in a home all adults present should have keys to the home.
- Adults should do random checks throughout the night/day to hotel rooms or bedrooms where youth are residing for the overnight trip.
- Exceptions to room policy apply to siblings, parent/child relationships and married couples. If same sex siblings wish to share a bed this is permitted. If a parent wishes to share a bed with their own child this is permitted. If a married couple wishes to share a bed this is permitted.
- \*Beds – Included but not limited to beds, sleeping cots, sleeping mats, etc.
- When youth are attending an overnight trip, contact via cell phone is mandatory and permission is granted when allowing the youth to attend the event. All communications follow the two-adult digital rule.

## **Zoom and Online Sessions / Digital Communication**

Staff and volunteers are to clearly use their real names when possible, and have a log of “handles” or “usernames” used by people guiding online conversations. It is important for people to know whom they are talking to online.

- Two certified, non-related adults are to be online when sessions are conducted with children and youth.
- When possible, online meetings should be set up through the Church accounts when scheduling online meetings. If the church account is not available, notify the Education Chairperson of the date and time when the personal account will be used.

Additions: No private 1:1 video calls with minors; use waiting rooms and disable private chat; do not share screenshots of minors without consent. Maintain participant logs and chat transcripts when feasible; retain for two (2) years.

## **Photography, Video & Livestream**

Parent/guardian consent is required for minors. Use church forms. Do not post names with faces; avoid geotags and identifiable school/team logos. Opt-out will be honored. No photos in bathrooms, changing areas, or during private pastoral conversations.

## **Code of Conduct**

Volunteers/staff agree to abstain from alcohol/drugs during events; use respectful language; follow digital/transport rules; and model Christ-like behavior. Boundary violations may result in removal from service, independent of civil/criminal outcomes.

## **Ministry with and to Vulnerable Adults**

### **Definition (State of New Jersey)**

For SUMC purposes, a vulnerable adult refers to a person 18 years or older who resides in a community setting and who, because of a physical or mental illness, disability, or deficiency, lacks sufficient understanding or capacity to make, communicate, or carry out decisions concerning their well-being, and may be subject to abuse, neglect, or exploitation. This includes, but is not limited to, persons living with dementia and the homebound.

Note: The NJ APS definition applies to adults living in community settings (private homes and other non-institutional settings). [NJ.gov](https://www.nj.gov)

## **Ministry Scope, Visitation & Communion**

*Church-sponsored vs. personal activity:* Church-sponsored ministry includes any visit, service, program, or communication authorized, scheduled, assigned, or supervised by SUMC, especially Congregational Care Ministry Team (e.g., Communion to the Homebound, Care & Concern/CCM visitation, pastoral care referrals). Participants must complete Safe Sanctuary training and screening, follow the two-adult standard. Personal (“friend”) activity is a congregant’s self-initiated visit or assistance not scheduled, assigned, or supervised by SUMC; it is not covered by church oversight, and congregants must not represent that they are acting on behalf of SUMC when making personal visits.

### **Standard practice for church-sponsored visits.**

- Use pairs for all in-home visits and for serving Communion (current practice: Communion in pairs).
- Though pairs are strongly preferred, one certified/trained adult may visit if another unrelated adult is continuously present or present for the entire visit (e.g., licensed home health aide/companion). The exception needs to be documented.

### **Facilities (hospital, nursing home, rehab).**

Public/common areas (chapels, lobbies, lounges, dining rooms, nurses' stations) are treated as public spaces; one certified/trained adult may visit there. Patient/resident rooms are private spaces and follow in-home standards: use pairs, or one certified/trained adult only if another adult (staff, family, or companion) is present throughout and the visit remains observable and interruptible (door ajar when appropriate and permitted).

## **Part Three: Training and Education**

### **Staff and Volunteer Workers (with Children and Vulnerable Adults)**

All staff and volunteers working with children and vulnerable adults must attend a training workshop provided by SUMC or at the District or Conference level. The purpose of the workshop will be to equip workers in:

- Defining abuse in all of its forms
- Recognizing the signs of abuse
- Becoming familiar with causes of and consequences of abuse
- Understanding the Safe Sanctuaries Policy and learning how to respond to and report abuse or allegations of abuse.

All staff and volunteers shall sign a consent form indicating that they have read and understand the Safe Sanctuaries Policy of the Succasunna United Methodist Church and will abide by the requirements of the policy. The Pastor or Safe Sanctuaries Coordinator will be responsible for ensuring that volunteers have met the requirements for training and screening outlined in the policy. All individuals shall complete a new application and undergo a new background check utilizing a Greater New Jersey Annual Conference-approved service and submit evidence thereof to the Pastor or Safe Sanctuaries Coordinator every three years via GNJ-approved vendor.

### **The Congregation**

- The pastor will preach the importance of children, youth, and vulnerable adults in worship and the life of the church.
- The congregation will be encouraged to attend Safe Sanctuaries workshops or training sessions offered by SUMC or at the District/Conference level.
- All parents and/or guardians who have children, youth, or vulnerable adults under the care of the church will be given a digital or hard copy upon request of the Safe Sanctuaries Policy. *A safe sanctuary form is attached to all online registration forms.*

- The policy will be posted in conspicuous locations throughout the church, including all Sunday School classrooms and Fellowship Hall, as well as on the church website, [www.sumcnj.org](http://www.sumcnj.org).

### **Outside Groups**

Outside groups requesting use of the church for activities involving children, youth, or vulnerable adults will receive a copy of this policy. Leaders will be asked to sign a form certifying that they have received and read this policy, and these forms will be kept on file for one year from the conclusion of the activity. At a minimum, all outside groups will be expected to abide by the two-adult rule. Boy Scouts and Girl Scouts, whose organizations have their own child protection standards, are expected to abide by those standards.

Additional requirements: Submit (1) group's child/vulnerable-adult protection policy; (2) written certification that all workers are screened/trained; (3) certificate of insurance naming SUMC as additional insured; (4) agreement to SUMC facility safety rules (ratios, bathroom protocols, etc.).

## **Part Four: Reporting and Responding**

Under state law, anyone who suspects or witnesses abuse of youth, children, and vulnerable adults has a legal obligation to report it to Child Protection and Permanency (CP&P - formerly the Division of Youth and Family Services, DYFS). Failure to do so may result in criminal prosecution.

### **Defining Child Abuse and Neglect**

Abuse, as defined by The State of NJ Department of Children and Families, is the physical, sexual or emotional harm or risk of harm to a child under the age of 18 caused by a parent or other person who acts as a caregiver for the child.

Neglect, as defined by The State of NJ Department of Children and Families, occurs when a parent or caregiver fails to provide proper supervision for a child or adequate food, clothing, shelter, education or medical care although financially able or assisted to do so.

The above definitions apply to abuse and/or neglect of youth, children, vulnerable adults and the elderly.

### **Initial Response**

If a suspected abuse incident occurs while a church worker or volunteer is on duty, the following actions should be taken:

- The first action will be to remove the child/youth/vulnerable adult from any immediate harmful situation.
- Immediately make a report to the adult in charge of the event/activity and the pastor: For minors, call CP&P at 1-877-NJ-ABUSE. For vulnerable adults, contact Adult Protective Services (APS) for the county of residence. If there is immediate danger, call 911. After reporting, inform the Pastor and document the report. *[If the Pastor is the alleged perpetrator, inform the SPRC Chair and/or the District Superintendent.]*



- The pastor, in consultation with the SPRC, may remove the alleged perpetrator from ministry positions involving children, youth, and vulnerable adults until the matter is resolved.

Do not investigate; do not notify the alleged perpetrator; preserve any evidence.

### **Documentation**

The process of documenting the incident will begin immediately and will follow the direction of the appropriate state investigating officials, the pastor, and the district superintendent. As a church community, we recognize that allegations of abuse must be handled with the utmost sensitivity to all those involved.

Retention: Incident reports and related materials retained for ten (10) years or, where a minor is involved, until the individual turns 28, whichever is later.

### **Handling of Reports**

If the incident takes place during a church-related activity, the following will be notified immediately:

- The Pastor: Myounghun Stephen Yun — Office: (973) 584-7349; Cell: (203) 928-8899
- The Parent(s) or Guardian(s)
- SRPC Chair: John Dewart – Cell: 973 -713-5200 (Only when the pastor is the alleged perpetrator)
- Child Protection and Permanency — 1-877-NJ-ABUSE
- Skylands District Superintendent: Rev. Dr. Eunice Vega-Perez — Cell: (908) 343-3706

The District Superintendent and CP&P/APS may instruct further reporting (law enforcement, insurer, legal counsel), and we will comply.

### **Suspected Abuse Occurring Outside of the Church**

If a staff member or volunteer has reasonable cause to believe that a child, youth, or vulnerable adult in our church community is being abused or neglected, at a minimum the following will be notified:

- Child Protection and Permanency — 1-877-NJ-ABUSE (minors) / Adult Protective Services (APS) (vulnerable adults)
- The Pastor: Myounghun Stephen Yun — Office: (973) 584-7349; Cell: (203) 928-8899

*\*\*Anti-retaliation: No person acting in good faith shall suffer retaliation for making a report.*

### **Communicating with the Public**

One person will be chosen to act as our official spokesperson (Lay Leader or Church Council Chair) to be available to the media to answer questions and interpret our Safe Sanctuaries Policy. With the advice of legal counsel, a prepared statement shall be the means by which our Safe Sanctuary Policy will be described to the public. The statement should reinforce that the church is prepared to handle the allegation and cooperate with all appropriate agencies and law enforcement to see that the matter is resolved in a manner that is just.