

# SAFE SANCTUARIES

**Reducing the Risk of Abuse in the Church  
for Children, Youth and Vulnerable Adults**



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

**Last updated: 2/22/2023**

**Adopted by Church Council: 2/22/2023**

**Next Review / Revision Due: First Quarter 2024**

## **Part One: Screening and Selection of Workers with Children and Vulnerable Adults<sup>1</sup>**

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 Annual Conference-approved service and submit evidence thereof to the Staff-Parish Relations Committee.
  
2. All current staff will be required to:
  - Undergo a background check utilizing a Greater New Jersey Annual Conference-approved service and submit evidence thereof to the Staff-Parish Relations Committee.
  
3. All 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 months, OR if not a member of this congregation/not a regular attendee volunteer must obtain two letters of recommendation from church members. In the latter case, certification is subject to approval by the Education Committee.
  - Undergo a background check utilizing a Greater New Jersey Annual Conference-approved service and submit evidence thereof to the Pastor or Safe Sanctuaries coordinator.
  - If a prior background check was completed, (e.g., for school teachers and others who work with children) documentation certifying same is required. When more than five years have elapsed between the application and the last background check, the individual must complete a new screening.
  - All volunteers must be made known of changes to the Safe Sanctuary Policy and are required to be Safe Sanctuary recertified every 5 years.
  
4. For non-US citizens, or in other cases where a background check is prohibitively expensive or impractical to obtain, two letters of recommendation from church members shall be required. In this instance, certification is subject to approval by the Education Committee.
  
5. The church will reimburse the cost of the Trak 1 background check through direct billing from Trak 1 to SUMC for all applications submitted.

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<sup>1</sup> Vulnerable adults are individuals with diminished physical, mental, or emotional capacities.

6. These files will be maintained in the confidential files of the church. An annual review of these records will be conducted by the Pastor or Safe Sanctuaries coordinator to ensure all credentials are up to date.

## **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, (whom shall not be related i.e. husband/wife, parent/child, siblings, etc.) 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, online Zoom sessions and any other activities where children, youth, and 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.

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 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 may be held in a public place (library, coffee shop, restaurant, etc.) 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 will require annual written consent approval by parents/guardians. These messages (ie. Inspirational messages, devotions, upcoming events) should be intended for a group audience but understand that one-on-one conversations take place. We highly recommend that when possible, another Adult or Education Committee member be copied on all communication for safety purposes. If no consent is given for the youth to receive messages directly, the youth's parents will be included in all communications.
  
- **Nursery**
  - The nursery will be available for children ages 3 and under while being accompanied with their parent.  
The nursery will be unlocked during both worship services and Fellowship Hour for the convenience of the parent/guardian accompanying the child. Worship services are video streamed in the nursery for parent/guardian viewing.
  
- **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 should be present in the vehicle. However, parents/guardians must be advised when only one certified adult will be present in a vehicle during transit. If there is only one certified adult in the vehicle the driver must be the certified adult. This information must be included on the trip permission slip form.
- Trip forms will be retained in the confidential files of the church for a period of one year from the date of the trip.
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- **Overnight Trips (Sleeping Accommodations)**
  - These guidelines are in addition to the guidelines listed under "Trips."
  - Trips requiring overnight travel will need a hotel room(s) or a home with the amount of beds\* provided equal to the number of youth staying overnight. 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.)
  - Adults may not share the same room as a youth. Adults should be in nearby room. 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. Another certified Adult attending the overnight trip is to be copied on all communication.

- **Zoom and Online Sessions**

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 will be set up through the Church accounts when scheduling online meetings. If the church account is not available, notify the Education Chairperson the date and time of when the personal account will be used.

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

#### **1. 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 five years.

#### **2. 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 hard copy of the Safe Sanctuaries Policy, upon request.

- The policy will be posted in conspicuous locations throughout the church, including Fellowship Hall.
- The Safe Sanctuaries Policy will be available to view digitally on the church website, [www.sumcnj.org](http://www.sumcnj.org).

### **3. 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.

### **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.

#### **1. 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.
- Report the incident/allegation to the adult in charge of the event/activity and the pastor. The pastor will then coordinate the reporting in #3 below. [Note: If the pastor is the alleged perpetrator, the charges will be reported to the Chair of the Staff-Parish Relations Committee, Kathy Mesaros, 908-917-6189, who will then coordinate the reporting in #3 below.]
- 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.

#### **2. 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.

### **3. 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)
- Child Protection and Permanency  
1-877-NJ-ABUSE
- Skylands District Superintendent: Rev. Dr. Eunice Vega-Perez  
Cell: (908-343-3706)

We understand that CP&P and the District Superintendent may instruct further reporting (for example, to law enforcement, the church's insurance company, legal counsel, etc.) and we will comply with such instructions.

### **4. 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
- The Pastor: Myounghun Stephen Yun  
Office: (973) 584-7349  
Cell: (203) 928-8899

### **5. Communicating with the Public**

One person will be chosen to act as our official spokesperson 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.

## **Part Five: Annual Review**

This policy shall be reviewed annually and approved by the Church Council within 1 year of prior approval.