

Crossroads Safe Sanctuaries

Policies & Guidelines

Introduction

A central tenet of the Christian faith is the inherent value and worth of all children, youth, and adults. Children, youth, and other vulnerable people are least able to protect themselves in our society and are particularly vulnerable to abuse and neglect. The United Methodist Church is eager to do all it can to protect the youth, children, and other vulnerable people who participate in the life of this congregation.

We believe implementing a policy and adopting procedures to protect our children, youth, and other vulnerable people recognizes that:

Our Christian faith calls us to offer both hospitality and protection to our children, youth, and other vulnerable people. The Social Principles of the United Methodist Church state, "...children must be protected from economic, physical and sexual exploitation and abuse." The Social Principles also state, "...all persons are individuals of sacred worth, created in the image of God."

Tragically, churches have not always been safe places for children, youth, and other vulnerable people. Neglect, sexual abuse, and exploitation occur in churches, both large and small, urban and rural. The problem cuts across all economic, cultural, racial, and ethnic lines. God calls us to make our churches safe places, protecting children, youth, and other vulnerable people from abuse.

Abuse prevention and ministry protection policies and procedures are essential for congregations, not only for the protection and safety of our children, youth, and other vulnerable persons, but also for our volunteers and staff working with them.

The Gospel calls us to be engaged in ministry with children, youth, and other vulnerable persons (*Safe Sanctuaries: Reducing the Risk of Abuse in the Church for Children and Youth*, page 10).

Jesus taught, "Whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me" (Mark 9:37 NRSV) and "If any of you put a stumbling block before one of these little ones...it would be better for you if a great millstone were fastened around your neck and you were drowned in the depth of the sea" (Matthew 18:6 NRSV).

- We should not allow possible risks to undermine or stop our ministry. Rather, we must:
- Acknowledge the risks and develop a practical plan to address these issues;
- Take steps to prevent harm to our children, youth, and other vulnerable persons; and
- Continue to answer the Gospel's imperative to be in ministry with children, youth, and other vulnerable persons, thus making a difference in their lives. (adapted from *Safe Sanctuaries: Reducing the Risk of Abuse in the Church for Children and Youth*, page 10).

Safe Sanctuaries policies and implementation of practices that reflect those policies seek to fulfill this call for our church.

Volunteer/Staff Selection Policies

All volunteers and paid staff who work with children, youth, and other vulnerable people at Crossroads UMC will be:

- At least 18 years of age. Exceptions apply for approved youth helpers.
- At least 5 years older than the oldest child/youth they will be supervising.
- Have participated in Crossroads' Teammate interest meeting

All volunteers and paid staff (including clergy) who work with children, youth and other vulnerable people at Crossroads UMC will:

- Complete and sign onboarding paperwork and the related waivers giving permission to perform a background check.
- Undergo a criminal background check if they will have leadership responsibility for children/youth/other vulnerable people. Individuals who have been convicted of physical or sexual abuse or neglect may not work in any church-sponsored activity or program for preschoolers, children, youth, or other vulnerable people.

All applicants must be interviewed for suitability for the work they desire to do. Interviews will be conducted by the leader of the program in which the applicant will work. Crossroads Safe Sanctuary Policies and Guidelines will be discussed during the interview. As well as signed and dated by both the leader of the ministry and the applicant.

Training

Prior to working in the youth's or children's ministries (or any area including other vulnerable people), workers must undergo child protection safety training. Comprehensive training on issues of child sexual abuse in church settings shall be required for all clergy, paid staff, and volunteers (e.g., youth group leaders) who regularly supervise activities for children, youth, and other vulnerable people. This training should be offered at least annually.

Ministry Supervision Guidelines

Whenever supervising activities involving children and youth at Crossroads UMC,

- At least adults will always be present.
- Children, youth, and other vulnerable people will be checked into and out of a church-sponsored activity by their parent or legal guardian or people authorized by the parent/legal guardian.
- Participants will have access to a telephone or cell phone when groups are at or away from the church facility.
- One-on-one interactions with children and youth will be in a space with an open door and visible to all. The pastor, parent or guardian, or another screened adult should be aware of any such interactions.
- Activities with children, youth, and other vulnerable populations should be accessible to staff, clergy, guardian, or other screened adult. Anyone has the right to visit and observe the children's/youth's/other vulnerable person's activity, classroom, or church-sponsored program at any time, unannounced as long as the two-adult rule is being followed.
- All classroom and office doors will have a window or be visible from the hallway, or doors should remain open while the room is occupied.

- If the two-adult rule cannot be observed, a screened, designated roamer will regularly check on groups with only one adult.
- For overnight events at the church and church-sponsored off-premise activities, two or more screened adults must be present. This arrangement must include at least one male and one female if the group is mixed-gender.

Whenever Crossroads UMC transports children, youth, or other vulnerable people away from the church campus,

- An adult should never transport a child/youth/other vulnerable person alone unless approved and signed by Guardian.
- Drivers of church vehicles should be approved and covered by the church's insurance company.
- Drivers should go through the same screening process as all other paid/volunteer staff.

The use of electronics or media communications may be useful tools in supporting ministries with children, youth, and other vulnerable people. However, in such circumstances, the following requirements shall be met:

- The volunteer or staff person shall never initiate a connection (friending, following, etc.) on social media.
- If a student initiates a connection, the child, youth, or vulnerable person's parent or guardian as well as the youth or children pastor in charge shall be notified.
- If an adult leader receives a private text from a child, youth, or vulnerable person the adult leader should immediately end the communication, and the ministry supervisor and/or parent/guardian should be made aware of the incident immediately.
- Adult leaders should post photos on social network sites only with prior written permission granted by a parent/guardian. When posted, PHOTOS MUST NOT BE TAGGED with names or location indicators. All photos must be appropriate and in keeping with the spirit of the ministry event.
- All in-person protection policies apply to online platform meetings like Zoom, Skype, Messenger, and so on. *(For example, two screened adults should be present in the virtual room just as they would be in a physical room.)*
- An official church account should be established and used for online activities, not a personal account.
- Communication about online meetings should be shared with parents/guardians as well as with children, youth, and other vulnerable people.
- Adult leaders and participants should use their real names as usernames.
- Attendance of online meetings should be documented.
- All electronic communications shall be documented and retained.

Whenever Crossroads UMC hosts an activity involving children, youth, or other vulnerable people from another church community organization,

- Groups using the church facility will follow Crossroads UMC's Crossroads Safe Sanctuaries Policies and Guidelines.
- Crossroads UMC volunteers and paid staff, including clergy, will be given the opportunity for training about Safe Sanctuaries policies, procedures, and child abuse issues on a regular basis. They will be rescreened every three years.

If a suspected incident of child abuse or neglect occurs or is revealed to a volunteer/paid staff person at a Crossroads UMC - sponsored activity, the adult in charge of the activity will:

- Ensure the safety of the child, youth, or other vulnerable people.
- Call the ministry supervisor, a pastor in charge, or a designee.
- Call the appropriate county/state hotline.

Head of Ministry Youth Ministry _____

Date reviewed on _____

Volunteer _____

Date reviewed on _____

