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Children and Youth Protection Policies At St. John's United Methodist Church

1. MISSION STATEMENT

The children and youth ministries at St. John's United Methodist Church provides opportunities and resources for children and youth to be involved in the church's mission of making disciples for Christ by demonstrating open hearts, open minds, open doors, and open arms.

These policies are to ensure that St. John's UMC is a safe and loving place for children and youth to grow in their faith and in their knowledge of what it means to be a Christian and to live out our mission. The basis of our faith, doctrine and church policies is scripture. Scripture provides the foundation for our ministries and is essential in developing our policies. The scriptures teach that children are a gift from God, wonderful and precious and are to be guarded and guided carefully. As a community of Christ's followers, we are responsible for helping to guide the children among us; we promise to do so as a congregation every time a child is baptized in our church.

*Behold, children are a gift of the LORD;
The fruit of the womb is a reward. Psalms 127:3*

2. SOUTH CAROLINA'S CHILD ABUSE LAWS

Under South Carolina law Section 20-7-490, a child is a person under the age of eighteen.

Child abuse or neglect occurs when the physical or mental health or welfare of a child is harmed or threatened with harm by the persons responsible for the child's welfare. This includes sexual abuse, physical abuse, emotional abuse and neglect

3. RESPONSIBILITIES OF ST. JOHN'S UMC

A. St. John's UMC

As a provider of childcare and Christian Education, SJUMC is responsible for the safety and well-being of children and youth while they are in its care. We are responsible both to the parents of the children and youth and to the legal authorities for having our facilities meet appropriate standards of physical and emotional safety and due care.

As a body of followers of Jesus Christ, we are responsible for providing love, care and support that reflects God's own relationship with God's children, for providing Christian fellowship and education, and for providing loving outreach, to church

attendees-from the oldest to the youngest- of our worship services, Sunday School, activities and programs.

As an employer of childcare workers and as a group of caring volunteers, we strive to protect our staff, paid workers, and volunteers from being in a situation where they may be falsely accused of inappropriate behavior toward any child or teenager in our care.

Within our Christian mission, our policies are designed to provide protection to both the children, youth and the workers by having a policy that no worker is placed into a position where they are alone with the children or youth and that no worker uses violent or inappropriate discipline methods. With appropriate assistance and witnesses in place, no opportunity should arise for any worker to commit any act of abuse against our children or youth and if such act should occur, our policies will prevent such acts of abuse from continuing.

B. Staff

Staff refers to paid full and part-time employees, and ministerial staff. Our staff is required to know the responsibilities of SJUMC toward its children and youth and toward the workers. They shall be trained in our policies and procedures. Staff must pass background checks intended to establish that they have no criminal record or history of child abuse. Those members of the staff and leaders of the church constituting the local response team (see Section 5, St. John's UMC Policy and Procedure for Reporting Child Abuse) or directly supervising paid childcare workers shall attend local and district church training in child protection; shall be cognizant of their responsibilities in the event of an allegation of child abuse; and shall be trained in the conduct of their related duties.

C. Paid Childcare Workers

Our paid childcare workers are responsible for knowing both church policy and South Carolina law regarding child abuse and protection. They must pass background checks and interviews, attend child protection training and be prepared to document any incidents which may indicate the presence of abuse. They shall be required to read, understand, acknowledge and sign this policy before beginning their duties at SJUMC. They are responsible for implementing and abiding by our written policies on child protection and classroom discipline.

D. Volunteer Workers in Children and Youth Ministries

Our volunteer workers in children and youth ministries are responsible for knowing these policies before being permitted to work with the children or youth. Volunteers must pass a background check intended to establish that they have no criminal record nor history of child abuse before they will be permitted to work with children or youth. Our volunteers should be aware that the potential for abuse exists and that they are part of our efforts at prevention. They are responsible for abiding by our written policies on child and youth protection and classroom discipline. Our volunteers are asked to prayerfully consider their calling to and behavior in the

children and youth ministry areas before participating in the work, so that no inappropriate behavior arises on their parts.

E. Preschool and After School Program

St. John's Preschool and After School Programs are ministries to the children and their families in our community and the church supports these programs. We realize the value of quality weekday childcare so therefore staff in these programs are required to know and abide by these policies. Staff must pass background checks in compliance with DSS regulations, including without limitation a child abuse registry check. Volunteers who work directly with the children are also responsible for knowing and abiding by these policies. They must also pass a criminal records check.

F. Community Groups Using SJUMC Facilities

Leaders/Representatives of community groups desiring to use our facilities and who have children in their program or who require childcare must read, agree to adhere to, and sign our Child and Youth Protection Policies before being permitted to use facilities belonging to SJUMC. Any such groups having no affiliation with SJUMC must also provide a certificate of insurance.

G. Sub-Contract Work

The Trustees will review each proposed contract with outside vendors who will perform work at SJUMC on an individual basis to determine the appropriate measures necessary to protect children and youth during the performance of the vendor's work and will include provisions incorporating those measures into such contracts.

4. GUIDELINES OF CHILD/YOUTH PROTECTION AT ST. JOHN'S UMC

To create a safe environment for children at St. John's UMC, we will continue to follow physical safety policies and will use additional protection measures as follows.

A. Six Month Rule

St. John's UMC requires that volunteer church workers in children or youth programs be members of the church for at least six months or be actively involved in the church for six months before beginning responsibilities. We make every effort to place new workers with longtime, experienced leadership volunteers. This six-month rule may be waived with a FBI fingerprint check. Paid workers, while not required to be members of St. John's UMC, will be supervised by experienced leaders, program staff members, or experienced volunteer leaders.

B. Worker Screening

Paid Childcare Workers: Before beginning employment, paid childcare workers will be asked to sign a Screening form containing a statement that they have never been convicted of child abuse as an adult or juvenile nor had such a conviction expunged.

Applicants refusing to sign the Screening Form will not be hired. In addition, applicants for paid childcare positions will undergo a background check, and will not be hired if they have been convicted of any sexual or violent crimes or any offense against a minor.

Volunteers: In order to ensure that we have responsible and appropriate people working in any area of the life of the church, volunteers are asked to prayerfully consider their calling toward a given ministry before committing to such service. The Nominations Committee, Administrative Board and the Annual Charge Conference also approach filling positions by first praying for responsible and appropriate people to do the work. In this way, we trust that the volunteers working in children and youth programs feel the Lord calls them to this ministry and are prepared for and suited to the work.

Notwithstanding the above, volunteer workers in our children and youth ministry shall read, sign and comply with these Children and Youth Protection Policies and any modifications or amendments made to these policies. Volunteers will also undergo a background check intended to establish that they have no criminal record nor history of child abuse.

C. Child Protection Training

Before beginning their paid or volunteer service, workers with children and youth will be required to read the church's Children and Youth Protection Policies and sign the Policies Acknowledgment Form indicating that they have read or have had read to them and understand the policies and agree to abide by them. Persons will not be permitted to serve until the policies have been read and the form signed. Periodically (no less than once per year and preferably more frequently), training sessions related to the Children and Youth Protection Policies will be offered. Paid childcare and youth workers, church staff members and individuals (whether paid or volunteer) directly supervising paid childcare workers will be required to attend at least one training session per year. Volunteer workers in children and youth programs and members of the Board of Trustees and the Chairperson of the Administrative Board will be strongly encouraged to attend.

D. Adult Supervision Policies

Two Worker Rule

Workers in our children and youth programs shall not be alone with children at any time, for the protection of both the children and the workers. This will be accomplished by implementing the following rules:

- Teachers and leaders will be assigned in teams of two or more per classroom and for church activities involving children and youth.
- In the event that a husband and wife serve in leadership together, a third, non-family member must be present.

Supervision of Mixed Gender Groups

When a group includes both boys and girls, and if the group 1) stays overnight at the church, or 2) leaves the premises for overnight trips, both male and female leaders must be present.

Field Trip Policy

The provisions of these Children and Youth Protection Policies apply to all field trips under the auspices of St. John's UMC.

- Field trips will be supervised by at least the minimum number of adults required by our policies, and preferably by more. In addition, a signed parental consent form with authorization for emergency medical care is required for such trips.
- When field trips are overnight events and adults must share a room with the children or youth, the adult must have his or her own bed.
- When someone other than the assigned leader will be driving the child or youth home or to another location after the group meeting, then the parents of the child or youth must give permission for the change in transportation.

E. Group Management Policies

St. John's UMC is committed to providing children and families with a safe and caring environment for learning to be disciples of Jesus Christ. Positive learning experiences enable children to develop a strong sense of self worth. The following guidelines are intended to facilitate such learning experiences.

- 1) Effective leaders serve as role models for children/youth, showing God's love in all actions and interactions.
- 2) Being respectful of children, their experiences, and feelings, encourages children to interact positively.
- 3) Well-planned, varied hands-on, age appropriate activities provide a positive learning experience, often avoiding conflict.
- 4) Reinforce appropriate behavior with praise and ignore negative behavior unless it violates the safety of others, self, or disrupts the group process. Distraction is a very useful tool to avoid conflict.
- 5) Consistency in setting and following group rules helps maintain group integrity.
- 6) No Corporal Punishment.

If a child/youth's behavior is inappropriate, and after the above guidelines have been followed, the child/youth should be removed from the group and the St. John's Director of Children's Ministries, Minister of Youth, and/or the Director of Christian

Education should be consulted. When appropriate, the parents will be informed of the inappropriate behavior.

F. Consequences For Policy Violations

If any action is observed, not constituting abuse, but in violation of our stated supervisory or disciplinary policies, the following consequences may be applied.

A volunteer acting in such a manner may be 1) taken aside by the volunteer or staff member in leadership and reminded of the disciplinary and child protection policies, 2) approached by the Senior Pastor and reminded of the disciplinary and child protection policies, and (if necessary) counseled on appropriate anger management, 3) removed from his/her position with the children or youth ministries and barred from participating in such ministries until he/she attends a Child Protection training session, or 4) permanently barred from contact with children or youth ministries. The choice of consequences will reflect the severity of the offense and whether such action is a repeated offense.

A paid employee observed in the same actions may be 1) verbally reprimanded 2) reprimanded in writing with a copy to the employee's file, 3) suspended from employment until undergoing additional training in Child Protection policies and procedures, or 4) dismissed with or without notice. The choice of consequences will reflect the severity of the offense and whether such action is a repeated offense.

G. Open Classroom Policy

Classrooms or childcare rooms may be viewed from outside the door at any time, without prior notice by church staff, parents, grandparents, guardian, or other volunteer church workers. However, visitors must be invited into the classroom by a class leader before entering. Visitors are requested to avoid causing disruption to the students/participants. No doors that have windows can be covered. Childcare workers or volunteers concerned about discipline, facilities, or any tensions, injury or incident may also request a visit from the Director of Children's Ministries, the Minister of Youth, the Director of Christian Education or a Trustee at any time.

5. ST. JOHN'S UMC POLICY AND PROCEDURE FOR REPORTING CHILD ABUSE

There are two possible situations requiring immediate action on the part of St. John's UMC, its members, staff and volunteers. If there should be allegations of child abuse at St. John's UMC or if a child coming to St. John's UMC exhibits signs of abuse occurring away from the church setting, the procedures below shall be followed. Due to the serious, sensitive nature of such a crisis, and the potential harmful effects both to the child and to the accused of false accusations and unrestrained gossip, the strictest confidentiality will be observed throughout the reporting process.

In order to minimize confusion and talk, **anyone** associated with St. John's UMC children or youth programs **who observes or has reason to suspect abuse, should report these observations/suspicions directly to the head of the relevant program.** That is, in the context of the children's programs, any reports should be brought directly and only to the Director of Children's Ministries. In the context of the youth programs, any reports should be brought directly and only to the Minister of Youth. Paid nursery workers, because the Nursery Administrator is the head of their program and their direct supervisor, have the additional alternative of reporting to only the Nursery Administrator, who must then report to the Director of Children's Ministries. In the context of the weekday Preschool and After School Program any reports should be brought directly and only to the Director of the Preschool and After School Program. The head of the relevant program is then responsible for informing the Director of Children's Ministries, the Director of Christian Education and the Senior Minister and following the procedures outlined below. If the supervisor or head of the program is **not available** or if the supervisor or head of the program **is the accused**, the observer is then responsible for directly contacting the Senior Minister immediately. If the Senior Minister is the one accused, the head of the relevant program will report the allegation directly to the Rock Hill District Superintendent.

1. Treat any allegation of child abuse seriously; do not ignore the issue in the hope that it will go away. Any individual observing acts of abuse occurring at St. John's UMC or suspecting abuse having occurred, even if away from St. John's UMC, should report the suspected abuse to the appropriate staff person.
2. After the Senior Minister has been informed, the allegations will then be reported to the Trustee Chairperson and the Administrative Board Chairperson.
3. The individual reporting the abuse shall document the incident and the pastor/program head shall document procedures observed in handling the allegation.
4. The appropriate individual will perform necessary notifications as follows:
 - The local church response team (Senior Minister, Trustee Chair, and Administrative Board Chair) shall call the Rock Hill District Superintendent immediately.
 - The Director of Children's Ministries or Minister of Youth will notify the South Carolina Department of Social Services (803-684-2315) immediately.
 - After consultation with DSS, the Senior Minister will make other appropriate notifications.
 - The Senior Minister or the Trustee Chair shall notify the church's insurance company in accordance with the policy provisions.
5. Individuals involved in reporting the suspected abuse or the local church response team should not confront any person affected by the allegations.
6. However, if the accused has assigned duties within the life of the church,

that person must be temporarily relieved of his/her duties until the investigation is concluded.

7. The Senior Minister should extend whatever care and resources necessary to both the victim of the suspected abuse and the accused, but under no circumstances should the Senior Minister, church leader or member investigate the allegation. In providing care to the alleged victim and the accused, and their families, the Senior Minister or church leader should under no circumstances be drawn into a discussion of the truth or falsity of the allegation. Do not assign blame or take any steps that involve establishing or refuting the allegation.
8. It is appropriate to show care, comfort and reassurance for all persons affected and to pray for an atmosphere of healing in the church.
9. Observe confidentiality for both the alleged victim and the accused throughout the investigation.
10. Public inquiries will be directed to the Senior Minister or the Administrative Board Chairperson.

6. POLICY REVIEW

The Children and Youth Protection Policies at St. John's United Methodist Church shall be reviewed annually by the Council on Ministries and their findings shall be reported to the Board of Trustees and the Administrative Board. If any amendments or changes to this policy are required, these changes will be submitted to the Board of Trustees and then to the Administrative Board for approval.

7. POLICY IMPLEMENTATION

Programs of the church involving children or youth will implement these policies. These policies do not take the place of or invalidate existing policies concerning additional physical safety procedures (fire safety and evacuation policy, playground safety policy, nursery cleaning/sterilizing policy, etc.) used in our children and youth programs.

These policies will go into effect immediately upon passage by the Council on Ministries and the Board of Trustees and the approval of the Administrative Board. Staff, paid childcare workers, youth program workers, and volunteers in the children or youth programs will be given a copy of these policies and requested to sign the Policies Acknowledgement Form within two months of the policies effective date. Within three months of the policies effective date, background checks will be initiated on paid workers and volunteers in the children and youth programs who have not yet undergone such an investigation.