

# Advent United Methodist Church Safe Sanctuary Policy

"Now it is required that those who have been given a trust must prove faithful." 1 Corinthians 4:2

## Purpose

Advent United Methodist Church has established this Safe Sanctuary Policy and accompanying procedures for the purpose of demonstrating our total and unwavering commitment to the physical, emotional and spiritual safety of all our children, youth, and vulnerable adults.

## Covenant Statement

Advent United Methodist Church ("Advent") hereby pledges to conduct the ministry of Jesus Christ in ways that assure the physical and emotional safety and spiritual growth of all of our children, youth and vulnerable adults as well as all of our workers with children, youth, and vulnerable adults. We will establish emergency procedures regarding medical, fire and weather emergencies and provide education and information on such to members and those who regularly attend Advent. We will follow reasonable safety measures when selecting and recruiting workers and volunteers. We will implement appropriate operational procedures in all areas of programming and care to protect the health and safety of children. We will train our paid staff and volunteers who work with children, youth and vulnerable adults on our procedures and policies; and we will have a clearly defined procedure for reporting a suspected incident of abuse consistent with South Carolina state law.

## Theological Reflection

We adopt this policy in accordance with the statement that we as a congregation make at each Baptism; that we will "nurture children and youth in the Christian faith and life and include them in our care." With this policy, we renew our Baptismal pledge to "live according to the example of Christ" and surround children and youth with a "community of love and forgiveness, that they may grow in their trust of God, and be thus confirmed and strengthened in the way that leads to life eternal." (Baptismal Covenant II, *United Methodist Book of Worship*,p.96).

## Definitions

<b>Volunteers</b>	Unpaid persons serving in ministry with children and youth.
<b>Children</b>	Persons from birth through fifth grade.
<b>Youth</b>	Persons from sixth grade through graduate of high school education or equivalent
<b>Adults</b>	Persons a minimum of age 18 and a graduate of high school education or equivalent.
<b>Paid Staff</b>	Personnel on the payroll of Advent United Methodist Church
<b>Ministry Leader</b>	Persons with position of authority over volunteers and or staff.
<b>Parent</b>	Parent or legal guardian
<b>Certified</b>	Paid staff and volunteers who have been trained and approved to work with children and youth.
<b>Vulnerable Adult</b>	Anyone aged 18 and over who is in need of community services because he/ she is unable to take care of himself/herself; is unable to protect himself/herself against significant harm or exploitation; or may have learning disability, mental illness, physical disability, visual and hearing impairment, HIV/AIDS or advanced age.

## **I. Staff Recruitment and Selection Guidelines**

### **A. Age**

Volunteers and paid staff to work with children and youth must be an adult and preferably 5 years older than the age of the persons they are serving. Pastoral staff may override the 5-year age difference on a case-by-case basis. This standard allows persons to be separated by enough years so as to better have perspective and recognition as an authority figure with the group they are serving. Persons not meeting these standards may not serve in a role of authority; however, they may serve as assistants to those in leadership roles.

### **B. Six-Month Rule for Volunteers**

Advent will not certify volunteers for children or youth in the church unless they have been a member of or have regularly attended the church for at least six (6) months. This time of interaction between ministry leaders and the volunteer allows leaders to better evaluate the suitability of a volunteer for particular service. In some situations, this rule may be waived on basis of probation. If the six-month rule is waived, ministry leaders may take additional steps to screen the applicant at their own discretion.

### **C. Application**

Applicants for paid staff positions must complete and sign an employment application and the related waivers giving permission to check references and background information. Both paid staff and volunteers must complete an "Authorization and Request for Criminal Background Check" and an "Application Questionnaire" as part of the application process. Any person who will drive children or youth on Advent-sponsored trips must submit to a motor vehicle check.

### **D. Reference Checks**

Church leaders will check three references for each paid staff member.

### **E. Background Checks**

Criminal background checks shall be made of all paid staff and volunteers, 18 years of age and over, to the extent permitted by law, prior to employment, to determine current or historic child abuse or sexual misconduct, criminal records, violent, or pedophilic behavior.

### **F. Prior Convictions**

Individuals who have been convicted of physical or sexual abuse or neglect will not work in any church-sponsored activity involving children, youth or vulnerable adults.

### **G. Confidentiality of Information**

The church will keep confidential all information received in the applicant selection process. Selection information will be marked as such and stored in a locked location with limited access afforded only to church staff and others with a need to know.

## II. Staff/Volunteer Supervision Guidelines

All meetings of children, youth, and/or vulnerable adults affiliated with Advent will be governed by the following guidelines:

### A. Two Unrelated Adult Rule

Two certified unrelated adults must be present at all times. This guideline applies to classroom activities and activities away from the church facility. Whenever possible, teachers will be assigned in teams of two or more per Sunday school hour to every class of children or youth. Other church sponsored or community groups of children or youth who meet at the church should have two or more approved unrelated adults present whenever possible. When feasible, both male and female leaders should be present. If the group stays overnight at the church, or if a church sponsored group leaves the premises, two or more approved unrelated adults must be present and must include at least one male and female if the group is mixed gender. Exceptions to the two-unrelated-adult rule may be made in the case of youth overnight outings and Youth free time as explained in section II-M of this document.

### B. Goals For Worker to Child Ratios

Advent has a goal of maintaining the following ratios of ministry workers to children and youth whenever possible. These ratios are goals. The church recognizes that in some circumstances achieving these ratios may not be feasible, such as an unexpected number of children or youth showing up for an event. However, the minimum number of workers will remain as two for any event.

#### Program Workers to Children

Program	Workers	Children
Nursery	2	10
Sunday School/Midweek	2	14
Youth Programs	2	16
VBS	2	14

### C. Checkout Procedure – Nursery Through Fifth Grade

All parents using the church nursery and children through grade 5 will observe the check-in/checkout procedure as outlined by Children's Council.

### D. Emergency Response Plans

First aid kits as well as procedures for emergency response plans are available in all classrooms. Fire drills as well as severe weather drills will be conducted periodically so that students and leaders are prepared for any emergency.

### E. Open-Door Policy

Further protection for the children requires an open door policy. This policy states that the parents of the children and youth served, paid staff, and ministry leaders of the church have the right to visit and observe the children's/youth activity, classroom, or church-sponsored program at any time, unannounced.

## **F. Line of Sight**

Understanding that there is safety in numbers, one adult can be in contact with multiple youth (6th-12<sup>th</sup> grade) so long as they are in line of sight of other adults. Any one-to-one mentoring or consulting shall be conducted in sight of another leader. At all times, when following the two-adult rule, the two certified leaders shall remain in visual contact with one another.

## **G. Bathroom Policy**

During organized church events, parents are encouraged to ensure that preschool-aged children do not attend the restroom unaccompanied. Parents and guardians are also encouraged to have children use the restroom with parental supervision prior to the start of the activity.

Parents and guardians are encouraged to have elementary-aged children remain in the sanctuary during the service, unless they accompany the child.

The following guideline shall be followed for activities involving children and youth and applies to both volunteers and staff. Volunteers and staff should not be alone with any child. Never close a bathroom door when entering a bathroom with a child. The door can be propped open with a trashcan or door stop and another staff member can be located within line of sight. If the child is old enough to go to the bathroom alone, volunteers and/or staff may stand outside the door but within line of sight of other adults.

## **H. Outside Access**

There must be access to a phone, cell phone or pager when groups are at or away from the church facility. The church office or authorized church representative will be given this number before the groups' departure from church property.

## **I. Doors and Windows**

All classroom and office doors will have window visibility from the hallway or will remain open while occupied. Windows will be kept free from adornment.

## **J. Individual Counseling**

One-on-one interactions are sometimes necessary and appropriate but care must be taken that ministry leaders conduct interactions in an environment that provides visibility. If at all possible, when in a counseling situation, another adult is to have knowledge of the staff members' whereabouts and with whom they are meeting. Line of sight rules shall apply. Children and youth receiving individual counseling should be told they are free to discuss any aspects of the counseling process with a parent or other adult, especially if they are uncomfortable about anything that occurs in counseling. All incidents of suspected abuse and neglect revealed during the session will be reported in accordance with section III of this policy.

## **K. Appropriate Behavior**

All children, youth and leaders are expected to behave in a Christ-like manner during all on and off campus activities sponsored by Advent. Youth and children of reading age will sign a covenant of Christian behavior. Paid staff and volunteers will be trained in appropriate behaviors as well.

## **L. Inappropriate Behavior**

Any questionable or inappropriate behavior directed towards children or youth during Advent sanctioned events and activities should be reported immediately (see section III).

Inappropriate behavior includes but is not limited to the following examples:

1. Sexually oriented humor or language.
2. Derogatory or demeaning comments regarding a participant's race, gender, or sexual orientation.
3. Unwelcomed or undesired physical contact.
4. Inappropriate comments about a participant's clothing or appearance.
5. Inappropriate comments about a participant's mental or physical capabilities.
6. Repeated requests for social engagements in situations where there is an employment, mentor, or colleague relationship between the persons involved.

## **M. Outings Away From Church Property**

All children and youth participating in out-of-town, off-campus, or over-night outings must have written consent and a completed medical release form. In no circumstance is one adult, other than the parent, to take a child or youth on an overnight outing alone. Neither shall a child or youth travel alone during a church-sponsored activity in a vehicle with only one adult unless it is their parent / legal guardian. Paid staff and volunteer leaders driving children or youth during a sanctioned Advent event must possess the applicable and current South Carolina State DMV license(s). Each passenger must wear a seatbelt when available during Advent off campus trips. Double buckling is not allowed.

On youth overnight outings, there will be a 1:8 certified adult: youth supervision ratio observed. Female certified adults will supervise female youth in their sleeping quarters and male certified adults will supervise male youth. Married couples will not stay together but observe the female/female and male/male sleeping arrangements. With the exception of a parent/child combination, an adult and youth may not occupy the same bed or sleeping bag.

At the discretion of the certified adult supervisors, youth may be permitted occasional free time, wherein constant adult supervision is not required. Under these circumstances, a three-person rule shall apply, meaning that youth will stay together in pre-agreed groups of three. Youth and adult supervisors shall agree upon the duration and destination(s) during this time. Violation of these agreements by youth may forfeit their future ability to have occasional free time. If the primary outing activity involves swimming, a certified lifeguard must be present during such activities.

## **N. Classroom Discipline**

All certified paid staff and volunteers will use the following discipline measures.

1. If a child is behaving inappropriately, the teacher will tell the child specifically what he/she is doing that is not acceptable and state the expected behavior.  
For example, "We do not throw the blocks. We use blocks for building."
2. If this measure is not effective, the child will be guided to another activity.
3. If inappropriate behavior continues, the child may be placed at a table to work alone away from the other students.
4. If the child's disruptive behavior continues after these steps have been taken, a teacher will notify the Director of Children's Ministries who will talk with the child and work with the child's parents or legal guardian.
5. **No physical punishment or verbal abuse, such as ridicule, are to be used at any time.** If isolating the child within the classroom or removal of the child from the

room becomes necessary, the situation will be discussed with the child's parents or guardian as soon as possible. Removal of the child if necessary, will be observed in a way that maintains the two-adult rule.

#### **O. Gifts**

No paid staff or volunteers are to give gifts to individual children or youth without the prior knowledge of the parent(s) or responsible clergy. Because gift giving can be a form of buying loyalty or silence, gift giving should be done on a group basis or for special occasions only. Gifts may not be elaborate but should be modest and appropriate to the occasion.

#### **P. Training**

All paid staff and volunteers must be Safe Sanctuary trained before working with children and youth. Once trained they will be deemed "certified." Certification is valid for five years.

Paid staff that supervise children and youth must maintain current certification in basic first aid and basic CPR. New employees will obtain this certification within 90 days of the start of their employment. Volunteers are encouraged, but not required, to receive first aid and CPR training if they frequently accompany children or youth on such activities as water sports, camping, home-building mission trips, etc.

#### **Q. Use of Advent United Methodist Church Facilities by Other Organizations**

Other organizations that use the Church premises for children and youth oriented activities (for example, Hope Academy, Boy Scouts, or Girl Scouts) will provide a copy of their policy to the Advent business office. The other organization's policy must be compatible to Advent's. The organization will also receive a copy of the Advent policy and will be responsible for adhering to it as well. The policy that is stricter will prevail.

### **III. RESPONSE BY CHURCH STAFF TO ALLEGATIONS OF ABUSE**

As caring Christians, we are committed to protect and advocate for children, youth, and vulnerable adults participating in the life of the church. The church is entrusted to provide an emotionally safe, spiritually grounded, healthy environment for children, youth, and adults in which they are protected from abuse. It is our legal and moral responsibility to report suspected abuse whenever it comes to our attention regardless of where that abuse takes place. We shall report suspected abuse to stop potentially existing abuse and to prevent further abuse. To report abuse is to witness to the world of the love and justice of God. Reporting abuse is a form of ministering to the needs of those crying out for help. If abuse occurs, it is our intention to act as an advocate for all affected persons, providing support, information, assistance and intervention. We seek to provide a supportive atmosphere, offering both objectivity and empathy as we seek to create a climate in which healing can take place. If abuse is suspected by, observed by, or disclosed to a volunteer and/or paid staff member of the church, that person shall report the incident immediately to the pastor or designee. (If the accused is the pastor, see information below.) Staff members responding to an allegation of abuse shall be prepared to do the following:

- A. Ensure the protection of and tend to the immediate needs of the child, as the situation requires.

- B. IMMEDIATELY contact the senior pastor or pastor on call or the adult in charge of the event. This person will:
- provide written documentation concerning the incident on the designated form.
  - notify the County Office of DSS. This is a requirement of the law. (Note: Do not attempt an investigation. This should be left to professionals who are familiar with these cases.)
  - notify the chair of the Staff Parish Relations Committee and the District Superintendent if the pastor is the accused party.
  - give written documentation to the pastor and/or Chair of the Staff Parish Committee.
- C. After having reported the suspected abuse to the proper authorities, the incident is to be reported immediately to the church's attorney, the church's insurance company, and the district superintendent. The district superintendent will report the allegation to the bishop's office. Do not try to handle this without professional assistance. If the accused is a clergy member of an annual conference, local pastor, or diaconal minister, provisions of Paragraph 359 and Paragraph 2702 of The 2000 Book of Discipline of The United Methodist Church must be followed.
- D. A list of emergency numbers will be available to the staff at all times.
- E. If the accused is working in a volunteer or paid position with children or youth in the church, immediately, yet with dignity and respect for the sacred worth of the person, remove the accused from further involvement with children and/or youth.
- F. Once the proper authorities have been contacted and the safety of the child or youth is secured, the pastor or other designated person may tell the accused that a report has been made. If the accused is a volunteer or paid staff of the church, that person shall be relieved temporarily of his or her duties until the investigation is finished. If the accused is a paid staff person of the church, arrangements should be made to either maintain or suspend his or her income until the allegations are cleared or substantiated.
- G. Any contact with the media should be handled by a pre-determined spokesperson. Care will be taken to safeguard the privacy and confidentiality of all involved. The spokesperson should generally convey that the matter is under investigation and any comments made prior to the conclusion of the investigation would be premature.
- H. A written report of the basic information shall be kept to ensure on-going ministry to, and advocacy for, victims and others involved. A form for this purpose shall be available in the church office. The report shall be brief and contain only factual information relevant to the situation. It shall be filed in a secure place in order to ensure confidentiality. It shall be written in ink or typed to prevent it from being changed. The church must also file a copy of the report with the bishop's office of the South Carolina Conference where it shall remain confidential.