

**Bethesda United Methodist Church
Safe Sanctuaries Policy
For the Protection of Children and Youth**

INTRODUCTION

In 1996, the General Conference of The United Methodist Church adopted a resolution aimed at reducing the potential for child abuse in the church. The resolution called all churches to welcome children and to make our churches safe places for children to grow and learn. It is our responsibility to be proactive in our recruiting and training, to find people with a gift for caring for children, and to protect those volunteers from false accusations. It is also our responsibility to oversee all programs involving children and youth to promote a safe environment and to have a plan of response in place. The General Conference resolution affirmed that every local church should have in place a policy for protecting children. The Baltimore-Washington Conference (BWC) required all local churches to have a policy in place beginning in 2008.

Thus, in unity with other United Methodist churches, Bethesda United Methodist Church (BUMC) adopts this policy for the prevention of abuse in our church. This policy applies to all volunteers, staff, and clergy.

PURPOSE

BUMC's purpose for establishing this Safe Sanctuaries policy is to demonstrate our commitment to the physical and emotional safety and spiritual growth of all children and youth participating in the church's programs and ministries.

STATEMENT OF COVENANT

As a Christian community of faith committed to ministry to and with children and youth, we pledge to conduct all our activities and ministries in a way that promotes the safety and spiritual growth of all children and youth entrusted to us. We will follow reasonable safety measures when selecting and recruiting paid staff members, implement appropriate operational procedures in all areas of programming and care, and be responsible in overseeing our programs and events and in training our staff and volunteers so they are equipped to minister to children and youth in Jesus' name. We will report and respond to all suspected incidents of abuse as required by state law and our moral conscience, and we will be prepared to minister to all involved.

A. SAFE SANCTUARIES TRAINING AND APPROVAL PROCEDURES

1. Definition of terms
 - a. Leaders – adults aged 18 or greater who have been Safe Sanctuaries approved

- b. Youth Leaders – youth aged 16-17 who have been Safe Sanctuaries approved
 - c. Youth - children aged 13 through 17 years of age
 - d. Volunteers – youth and adults who are not staff who work with children
 - e. Staff – employees and contractors who come under the purview of the Staff Parish Relations Committee (SPRC)
2. Screening and recruiting
- a. All leaders and volunteers who work regularly with children and youth and all staff must complete Safe Sanctuaries training and be approved. (Note, clergy are required to complete training through the Baltimore-Washington Conference.)
 - b. All leaders and volunteers who regularly work with children and youth must be a member of this church for at least six months or demonstrate an active relationship with this church for at least 6 months, before being allowed to complete Safe Sanctuaries training.
 - c. Individuals who have been convicted of physical or sexual abuse or child neglect may not work in any church-sponsored activity or program for children or youth.
 - d. Background checks for clergy are conducted by the BWC.
 - e. Background checks for staff and employees are conducted by BUMC through Shepherd's Watch as recommended by the BWC. Results are returned to the Office Manager as either pass or fail.
3. Safe Sanctuaries approval process
- a. Prior to leading activities involving children and youth, all leaders and volunteers and all staff will be required to:
 - i. Participate in the BUMC Safe Sanctuaries Training Program (yearly)
 - ii. Complete the Participation Covenant Statement (yearly)
 - iii. Complete the Sexual Misconduct Questionnaire (yearly) (Note: due to the 6 month requirement, the reference section of this form need not be completed)
 - iv. Successfully complete a criminal background check (adults only – every three years); leaders and volunteers will be sent a link to the appropriate website by the Church Office Manager
 - b. Safe Sanctuaries approvals will be reviewed annually to ensure compliance.
 - c. Once the above steps have been completed and the information reviewed and approved by the Director of Christian Education and/or the pastor(s), the individual will be notified and may begin working with children and youth. If the individual does not meet criteria, the individual will be counselled privately by the pastor.
 - d. All paperwork will be kept on file in a secure area at the church with access limited to pastor(s) and church staff.
 - e. The date of background checks will be stored in Breeze.

4. Exceptions
 - a. Leaders from other churches who are participating in activities hosted by BUMC must have completed a Safe Sanctuaries-like program at their home church and must provide proof of current status (e.g., a letter from their Pastor or church administrator) as per their church's policy.
 - b. Youth ages 16-17 who wish to volunteer with children on a regular basis must have permission from a parent and must be approved by the Director of Christian Education or the pastor and must complete Safe Sanctuaries training as described above. During Vacation Bible School, youth who are not members of BUMC may undergo approval as described immediately above and need not complete Safe Sanctuaries training but must work with a Safe Sanctuaries approved adult.
 - c. Volunteers who are helping on an infrequent or one-time basis will be permitted to work only if they are always with at least one Safe Sanctuaries approved, adult leader (not a roving leader).
 - d. All volunteers leading youth (ages 13-17) activities must be aged 23 or older to ensure that all volunteer leaders are at least 5 years older than the participating youth.

B. SUPERVISION

1. Two-adult rule: two adult volunteers, at least one of whom is Safe Sanctuaries approved, will be present in each room/space during all programs involving children or youth. This applies to classroom activities, activities away from the church premises, and when transporting children or youth. An open door connecting two rooms, where each room has at least one Safe Sanctuaries approved leader, satisfies this requirement. If this is not feasible, there will be a roving adult who moves among the rooms during the program period.
2. Age requirements: At least one volunteer leading children activities must be over age 18; the second adult may be an approved youth ages 16-17. All volunteers leading youth (ages 13-17) activities must be aged 23 or older.
3. Classroom and office doors will have an unobstructed window or be left open whenever children or youth are in the room.
4. Open-door policy: The parents of the children or youth served, the pastors, and church staff may visit and observe the children's/youth activity, classroom, or church-sponsored program at any time, unannounced.
5. Children in the nursery will be checked in and out by their parent, legal guardian, or other person authorized by the parent/legal guardian.
6. Touch: Physical affection should be limited and must be appropriate to the age of the child or youth. Touching should ordinarily be initiated by the child and be

done in the presence of other volunteers or staff. A child's preference not to be touched should be respected.

7. Restroom policy: When taking preschoolers or young children to the restroom, the adult should remain outside the stall. If the child needs help, the help should be given outside the stall when feasible. Ideally, another adult should be present at the door of the restroom.
8. If an adult who is scheduled to be working with children becomes unavailable or needs to leave early, that adult should try to find a substitute who has been Safe Sanctuaries approved and should notify the Director of Christian Education as soon as possible.
9. While working with children or youth, paid staff and volunteers should not use their cell phones to make or receive personal calls, texts, etc., and should keep their full attention focused on the children or youth.

C. PHOTOGRAPHS

Social media and communications are a part of the ministry of BUMC. Photographs of children and youth may be used in both online and hard copy publications (The Messenger, Bulletin, weekly updates, Facebook, etc.). The names of participants typically are not included. At the time of registration for Sunday School, Kids With Purpose, or youth group, parents will be given the opportunity to opt out of having their child included in these photographs. Of note, BUMC is not responsible for incidental photos (including "photo bombs" by a child) that may appear in these publications both hard copy and online.

D. OUTINGS OVERNIGHT OR AWAY FROM CHURCH PROPERTY

1. All children and youth participating in out-of-town or overnight outings (including church lock-ins) where they are not under the direct supervision of their parents/guardians must have written consent and a medical release form. Medical release forms may be completed for a one-year period and must be renewed annually.
2. No one under the age of 21 will be permitted to drive others (whether adults, children, or youth) on any church-sponsored outing.
3. Transportation arranged by the church for children or youth should have at least two adults (at least one of whom has fulfilled all the Safe Sanctuaries requirements) in each vehicle. For local events, parents may instead choose to carpool.
4. For overnight events, two or more adult leaders must be present and must include at least one male and one female if the group is of mixed gender. Female staff will supervise female youth in their sleeping quarters and male staff will supervise male youth in separate sleeping quarters. Exceptions for an individual

child or youth may be made after discussion with the child's or youth's parents. Married couples will not stay together but will observe the female/female and male/male sleeping arrangements. Adults will not share a hotel room, bunkhouse, or tent with youth or children, unless there are at least two non-related adults and at least two children or youth present in that space. Except for a parent/child combination, an adult and a child or youth will not occupy the same bed or sleeping bag.

5. There must be access to a phone or cell phone when groups are away from the church property.
6. Attendance records of children, youth, and leaders must be taken at all overnight or out-of-town events.
7. Upon returning to the church, at least two adults must remain until all the children or youth have been picked up.
8. With the exception of parents of youth participating in the event, all adults who attend overnight events must be Safe Sanctuaries approved.

E. YOUTH PARTICIPATING IN ADULT ACTIVITIES

1. Two-adult rule: two adults will be present during the activity. At least one of the adults must be Safe Sanctuaries approved or a parent of the youth involved.
2. Parents will be instructed not to leave their youth at an activity unless two adults are present. Youth who are driving themselves to an activity should wait outside the building until two adults are present.
3. When youth are participating in an activity where two or fewer adults are present, the door will be left open.

F. TRAINING

Training on Safe Sanctuaries policies and procedures will occur at least once a year and participants will be trained to recognize the warning signs of abuse and neglect.

G. REPORTING AND RESPONDING

1. If abuse of a child or youth is suspected by, observed by, or disclosed to a Safe Sanctuaries approved volunteer and/or paid staff member of the church, that person will, after ensuring the child's or youth's safety, report the matter immediately (within 24 hours) to a church official: either the Director of Christian Education, the pastor(s), or the SPRC Chair. Whichever of these officials receives the initial report will immediately notify the other officials.
2. Upon being informed of an alleged incident of abuse, the pastor(s), where appropriate, will make a report to the local department of social services and/or

the police. Reporting to state and or local authorities must occur within 48 hours of knowledge of the incident. The pastor(s) will consult with the District Superintendent, the bishop, the Chair of the Staff-Parish Relations Committee, and/or legal counsel as appropriate.

3. If the church becomes aware of alleged abuse done by a church staff member or volunteer, that person will immediately be removed from contact with children and youth until the reported incident has been resolved. This should be handled in a discreet manner and the suspected person should not be banned from other church ministries.
4. If the allegation concerns a staff member or pastor, the Chair of the Staff-Parish Relations Committee and the District Superintendent will be contacted immediately and the above process will be followed.
5. The pastor(s) or a designee will keep a written record of all steps taken to report the alleged abuse.
6. Requests for public statements about the incident will be referred to the pastor(s) and/or the District Superintendent.
7. Pastoral support will be available to all persons involved in the incident.

CONCLUSION

In all our ministries with children and youth, this congregation is committed to demonstrating the love of Jesus Christ so that each child, youth and vulnerable adult will be “surrounded by steadfast love, established in the faith and confirmed and strengthened in the way that leads to life eternal.” (Baptismal Covenant II, United Methodist Book of Worship)

Attachments

1. Volunteer Application - Adult
2. Participation Covenant Statement – Adult
3. Laity-Sexual-Misconduct - Form BWC 2025
4. Volunteer Application - Youth
5. Participation Covenant Statement - Youth
6. Safe Sanctuaries Quiz

Link to training Video: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KpX_RpS1TYs

Bethesda United Methodist Church
Safe Sanctuaries
Application for Youth Volunteer Positions with Children and Youth
(Adult Volunteer)

Name: _____

Are you age 18 or older? ☐ Yes ☐ No

Home address: _____

City: _____ State: _____ Zip: _____

Home phone: _____ Cell phone: _____

Email address: _____

Occupation: _____

Previous volunteer experience: _____

Date watched the Safe Sanctuaries training: _____

Have you ever been charged with, convicted of, or pled guilty to a crime, either a misdemeanor or a felony (including but not limited to motor vehicle violations, drug-related charges, child abuse, other crimes of violence or theft)? ☐ Yes ☐ No

If yes, please explain fully: _____

Please answer the following two questions only if you will be driving for church-sponsored outings:

Do you have a valid drivers license? ☐ Yes ☐ No

Do you have liability insurance? ☐ Yes ☐ No If yes, list policy limits & name of carrier _____

Signature and Date: _____

Bethesda United Methodist Church
Safe Sanctuaries
Adult Participation Covenant Statement

The congregation of Bethesda United Methodist Church is committed to providing a safe and secure environment for all children, youth, workers, and volunteers who participate in ministries and activities sponsored by the church. The following policy statement reflects our congregation's commitment to preserving this church as a holy place of safety and protection for all who would enter and as a place in which all people can experience the love of God through relationships with others.

1. No adult who has been convicted of child abuse (either sexual abuse, physical abuse, neglect, emotional abuse, or ritual abuse) should volunteer to work with children or youth in any church-sponsored activity.
2. All adult volunteers involved with children or youth of our church must have been active in the congregation for at least six months before working with children and youth.
3. Adult volunteers with children and youth shall observe the "Two Adult Rule" at all times so that no adult is left alone with children or youth.
4. Adult volunteers with children and youth shall attend regular training and educational events provided by the church to keep volunteers informed of church policies and state laws regarding child abuse.
5. Adult volunteers shall immediately report to the pastor or other available staff member any behavior that seems abusive or inappropriate.

Please answer the following questions:

1. As a volunteer in this congregation, do you agree to observe and abide by all church policies regarding working in ministries with children and youth? ☐ Yes ☐ No
2. As a volunteer in this congregation, do you agree to observe the "Two Adult Rule" at all times? ☐ Yes ☐ No
3. As a volunteer in this congregation, do you agree to abide by the "Six Month Rule" before working with children and youth? ☐ Yes ☐ No
4. As a volunteer in this congregation, do you agree to participate in relevant training and educational events? ☐ Yes ☐ No
5. As a volunteer in this congregation, do you agree to promptly report abusive or inappropriate behavior to the pastor or other available staff member? ☐ Yes ☐ No
6. As a volunteer in this congregation, do you agree to inform a pastor of this church if you have ever been convicted of child abuse? ☐ Yes ☐ No

I have read this Safe Sanctuaries Participation Covenant Statement and I agree to observe and abide by the policies set forth above.

Signature and Date: _____

Printed Name: _____

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Laity Sexual Misconduct Questionnaire

Baltimore-Washington Conference – Church Conference 2025



To be completed and signed by all persons who are to work with children and youth within the ministry of.

Please check the appropriate box. If more space is needed, please use an additional piece of paper

Name:	
Date :	

☐ YES ☐ NO	1. Have you ever filled out this questionnaire for this church or agency? - If NO (or unsure) please answer questions 3 - 9 below. Then sign and return this form. - If YES, please give the date: _____ and answer question #2
☐ YES ☐ NO ☐ NOT SURE	2. If you answered "YES" to Question #1, have any answers changed since you filled out that copy? - If NO, please sign and return this form. - If YES OR NOT SURE, please answer questions 3 - 9 below
☐ YES ☐ NO	3. Have you ever been accused, in a written and signed statement of sexual misconduct with a child or a youth?
☐ YES ☐ NO	4. Have you ever been accused in a written and signed statement of sexual misconduct with an adult?
☐ YES ☐ NO	5. Have you ever been dismissed from any position, volunteer or salaried, because of accusations of sexual misconduct on your part?
☐ YES ☐ NO	6. Have you ever resigned from any position, volunteer or salaried, because of an accusation of sexual misconduct on your part, or to avoid being dismissed because of an accusation of sexual misconduct on your part?
If your response to any of the foregoing questions (2 through 5) is "yes", please provide all details regarding each accusation of sexual misconduct that has been made with respect to you, including a description of the alleged conduct, the name of the person who made the accusation, the date of the alleged misconduct, and the name of your employer at the time of the alleged misconduct. Please attach explanation.	
☐ YES ☐ NO	7.a Have accusations of sexual misconduct on your part ever resulted in civil or criminal court proceedings at any level (e.g. indictment, arrest, trial, etc.)? If yes, please provide the complete details of those proceedings (including dates, circumstances, the jurisdiction where the proceedings occurred, the nature of the accusations, and the result of the proceedings). Provide explanation below or attach additional document
☐ YES ☐ NO	7.b Have accusations of sexual misconduct against you resulted in civil or criminal court proceeding on more than one occasion? If so, please provide the same details with respect to each such proceeding. Please attach explanation.
☐ YES ☐ NO	8 Other than the above, is there any fact or circumstance involving you or your background that would call into question your being entrusted with the supervision, guidance, and care of young people? Please attach explanation.

9		Please provide three adult references (names, addresses, phone numbers) of persons who are not related to you by blood, marriage or other family relationship and are not employed or supervised by you, who can to the best of their ability, provide statements in support of your good behavior and clean record in regard to sexual misconduct with children, youth and adults.	
	Name 1 :		
	Address :		
	City, State Zip :		
	Phone :		
	Name 2 :		
	Address :		
	City, State Zip :		
	Phone :		
	Name 3 :		
	Address :		
	City, State Zip :		
	Phone :		
I verify that the answers I have provided on this Questionnaire are true and accurate to the best of my ability. I understand false answers, as well as the failure to sign this Response Form, will result in my being denied the position for which I am being considered.			
Signature:			
Printed Name:			
Date :			

References Not Applicable

Bethesda United Methodist Church
Safe Sanctuaries
Application Volunteer Positions with Children
(Youth Volunteer)

Name: _____

Home address: _____

City: _____ State: _____ Zip: _____

Cell phone: _____

Email address: _____

Age: _____ Date of Birth: _____

Parent Name: _____

Parent Cell phone: _____

Previous volunteer experience:

Signature: _____ Date: _____

Parent Signature: _____ Date: _____

**Bethesda United Methodist Church
Safe Sanctuaries
Youth Participation Covenant Statement**

The congregation of Bethesda United Methodist Church is committed to providing a safe and secure environment for all children, youth, workers, and volunteers who participate in ministries and activities sponsored by the church. The following statement reflects our congregation's commitment to preserving this church as a holy place of safety and protection for all who would enter and as a place in which all people can experience the love of God through relationships with others.

1. No one who has been convicted of hurting children should volunteer to work with children or youth in any church-sponsored activity.
2. All volunteers involved with children or youth of our church must have been active in the congregation for at least six months before beginning a volunteer assignment, unless approved by the pastors and Director of Christian Education to work with Vacation Bible School.
3. All volunteers with children and youth shall observe the "Two Adult Rule" at all times so that no adult is left alone with children or youth, and no children and youth are left unsupervised.
4. All volunteers with children and youth shall attend regular training and educational events provided by the church to keep volunteers informed of church policies and state laws regarding child abuse.
5. Adult volunteers shall immediately report to an adult in charge any behavior that seems abusive or inappropriate.

Please answer the following questions:

1. As a volunteer in this congregation have you participated in the Safe Sanctuaries Training Program?
☐ Yes ☐ No
2. As a volunteer in this congregation, do you agree to observe and abide by all church policies regarding working in ministries with children and youth? ☐ Yes ☐ No
3. As a volunteer in this congregation, do you agree to observe the "Two Adult Rule" at all times?
☐ Yes ☐ No
4. As a volunteer in this congregation, do you agree to participate in relevant training and educational events?
☐ Yes ☐ No
5. As a volunteer in this congregation, do you agree to promptly report any inappropriate behavior to an adult in charge? ☐ Yes ☐ No
6. As a volunteer in this congregation, do you agree to inform a pastor of this church if you have ever been convicted of hurting a child? ☐ Yes ☐ No
7. As a volunteer of this congregation, do you agree to follow the instructions of the adults in charge, staff and pastors? ☐ Yes ☐ No

I have read this SAFE SANCTUARIES YOUTH PARTICIPATION COVENANT STATEMENT and I agree to observe and abide by the policies set forth above.

Signature of Applicant Date

Print full name

Signature of Parent/Guardian Date

Print full name

Bethesda United Methodist Church
Safe Sanctuaries
Quiz

Please complete the questions below to review the information provided in our Safe Sanctuaries training. THANK YOU FOR VOLUNTEERING AND FOR HELPING TO ENSURE THAT OUR CHILDREN ARE ALWAYS SAFE!

1. Studies have shown that 1 out of _____ girls is sexually abused before age 18 and
2. 1 out of _____ boys is sexually abused before age 18.
3. Before working with children, a volunteer must be active in church for at least _____ months.
4. There will be at least _____ adult(s) in each classroom (or a roving adult moving between classrooms during the activity period).
5. Volunteers must be at least _____ years older than the oldest youth they are supervising.
6. True or False: Parents or guardians may visit their children's classroom anytime.
7. When taking young children to the bathroom, the adult should stay outside the _____.
8. While working with youth or children, volunteers should stay off their personal _____.
9. A written request must be sent to the church office if a parent does not want their child to be in _____ and posts
10. Volunteers and Staff need to be trained every _____ months on Safe Sanctuaries procedures.
11. If you suspect abuse, you should (select one):
 - A. Conduct a thorough investigation
 - B. Wait to see if it happens again
 - C. Tell as many people as possible
 - D. Ensure the child's safety if possible and immediately and in confidence, report your suspicion to a pastor, other staff member, or Chair of SPRC.
12. Which of the following is NOT a form of abuse?
 - A. Sexual contact between a child and adult
 - B. A person exposes child to emotional cruelty
 - C. A person reprimands a child for inappropriate language
 - D. A person intentionally causes bodily harm
 - E. A person endangers the welfare of a child through negligence
13. True or False: Transportation arranged by the church must have at least one adult in the vehicle who is Safe-Sanctuaries trained.
14. Why do we need a Safe Sanctuaries program?
 - A. To protect volunteers and staff from false allegations
 - B. It has been mandated by our Baltimore-Washington Conference
 - C. To protect children, youth and vulnerable adults from abuse
 - D. All of the above