

ST. MARK'S
UNITED METHODIST CHURCH



SAFER
SANCTUARIES
POLICY

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A special thank you to the Safer Sanctuaries team for their tireless contributions to the writing of this policy: Paula Coleman, Addison DaDeppo, Pam Howard, Patty Owens, Harold Putt, Barb Sargent along with staff members Rev. Deborah Christine, Edwin Andrade, and Rachel Mosher.

Introduction

At St. Mark's United Methodist Church, we gather, connect, and serve so that all may experience the love of Christ. We, the congregation and staff at St. Mark's United Methodist Church, have been entrusted with the care of our entire church community. Our community is made up of many unique individuals with varied backgrounds, ages, sexual identities and orientations, cultural identities, neurotypes, and multiple other aspects of diversity. Any individual, regardless of where they identify in any of these areas is welcome to be their true and authentic self at St. Mark's UMC.

We have a responsibility to offer as safe an environment as possible. We would be challenged to maintain our community if our mutual trust and respect is tested by accusations of abuse, whether real or fabricated.

We have a divine mandate to nurture God's children of all ages, including doing our best to see that they receive no physical or emotional harm or abuse while in our care.

Abuse means harm or threatened harm to the health and welfare of a child, youth, or vulnerable adult by any person responsible for the health and welfare of that individual. For the purposes of this policy and its implementation, children and youth are individuals who are up to grade 12 (and may be up to and including age 18), and a vulnerable adult is an adult, aged 18 or older, who is unable to protect themselves from abuse, neglect, or exploitation. It is important to recognize that based on the specific situation, all adults could be considered vulnerable.

We have a responsibility to our church leaders to provide guidance for recognizing, avoiding, and preventing abuse. We have a responsibility to protect them from unfounded accusations that would result in financial damages, destroy their reputation, and ruin their lives.

We have developed the following Safer Sanctuaries policy to ensure that we do our best to provide a sacred and safe environment for all individuals who participate in St. Mark's programs. This policy is not a policy written solely for our Children's Ministry. This policy is written for the ministry of the church.

This policy will be publicly available on the St. Mark's UMC website along with necessary forms and addendums. For any questions, please see the Director of Discipleship.

St. Mark's UMC Safer Sanctuaries Policy

Rule of Three

St. Mark's UMC Safer Sanctuaries Policy is based on the Rule of Three. The Rule of Three stipulates that whenever possible, leaders and supervisors for any gathering will ensure that two unrelated adults will be present. When this is not possible due to staffing or confidentiality needs, interactions must take place in spaces that can both be observed and interrupted. In the case of a minor or vulnerable adult using a restroom unassisted, the supervising adults will position themselves so that one can check to ensure the restroom is unoccupied, and then stand outside of the threshold of the restroom. The other adult should be able to observe any interactions that may take place.

This is done to help to prevent abuse. It is more difficult to do harm when there are additional witnesses present, and it provides a second adult who should not be intimidated by the first adult. This rule should help to prevent false allegations of abuse, for whatever reasons they may occur.

Every effort must be made to ensure that a second adult can be present. All church sponsored gatherings and all activities must be easily observable and interruptible. This means doors are unlocked, you are in an observable and interruptible space, and windows coverings are opened.

Screening

All volunteers and leaders over the age of 18 at St. Mark's UMC will undergo a background screening. The volunteer application can be found [here](#). Volunteers and leaders under the age of 18 are not subject to the background check, but do need a volunteer application on file. Youth volunteer applications can be found [here](#).

Screenings will be maintained annually for all church leaders and volunteers. The staff person in charge of the desired area of involvement will check references using the Reference Check Form found [here](#). Applicants will maintain a copy of their application along with a copy of St. Mark's UMC's Safer Sanctuaries Policy. The Director of Discipleship will maintain applications and background checks for all individuals in leadership positions and oversee annual background screenings.

St. Mark's volunteers who participate at local schools on behalf of St. Mark's may have additional or separate screening requirements. These procedures are independent of those of St. Mark's and in these cases, volunteers must be in compliance with both policies.

Unfortunately, it may be the case that someone does not pass this screening process. If this does arise, the individual will be referred to the staff person who oversees the ministry and given the opportunity to contest the findings of the report. If the individual is church staff, they will be referred

to the Staff Parish Relations Committee. If the individual is clergy the information will be given to the District Superintendent.

St. Mark's UMC recognizes that maintaining confidentiality and keeping personal information secure is very important. Every effort will be made to guarantee that information will be stored in a safe and secure manner.

Behavior

If anyone behaves in a way that is inappropriate or disruptive to the church sponsored event, the staff/adults-in-charge have the right to separate the individual from the group if they do not respond to requests to stop the negative behavior. Options for separations can include removal with supervision in a separate location, asking an individual to leave the premises, or contacting law enforcement. In some cases, it would be appropriate to call a student's parent or legal guardian to inform them of the situation.

Worship Spaces

Worship is foundational here at St. Mark's. We welcome all people of all ages into our community, which is made up of diverse individuals with varied backgrounds, ages, sexual identities and orientations, cultural identities, neurotypes, and many other aspects of diversity. Every person, regardless of where they identify in any of these areas, is invited and encouraged to be their true and authentic self in worship at St. Mark's UMC.

We also provide accommodations to ensure that everyone can engage meaningfully in worship, including hearing assistance devices, large-print bulletins, and accessible spaces for those who prefer or need room to move, wiggle, or stretch. Our narthex and Meditation Room offer space for those who may benefit from a flexible or sensory-friendly environment.

We believe that the full participation of all God's children enriches our worship together. We celebrate the joyful presence of children and welcome their sounds and movement as part of our shared praise. For those who may need a quieter space or additional support, our Meditation Room (located near the organ) offers a comfortable place for families to tend to little ones while remaining connected to the service.

At St. Mark's, we affirm that all people are created in the image of God and that worship is most beautiful when every voice, body, and heart is fully included.

Programs

Programs are defined as all church- sponsored activities (on and off campus) that are not a part of worship.

Guidelines

The “Four-Years-Older” Rule: Leaders of events for children and youth at St. Mark’s UMC should be over the age of eighteen and at least four years older than the oldest participants at the event. Assistant leaders may be minors, but must be four years older than the oldest participants at the event. This rule does not apply to ministries for vulnerable adults. For adult ministries, leaders shall be adults over the age of eighteen.

Children	Youth	Adults
Event leaders must be 18 AND at least four years older than the oldest participant. Assistants must be at least four years older than the oldest participant.	Event leaders and assistants must be over the age of 22.	This rule does not apply to adult ministries.

Program Registration

Children	Youth	Adults
Children will be registered each year in August for the program year. This registration form is available in paper and digital forms.	Youth will be registered each year in August for the program year. This registration form is available in paper and digital forms. This form serves for both registration and a permission slip.	Adult registration varies by event.

Off Campus Transportation

Church-owned vehicles will have regular maintenance and upkeep and be properly insured. Drivers of church owned vehicles must be legally licensed drivers, have a clean driving record for the past two years, have been trained by a staff member on driving a large vehicle, and demonstrate comfort in driving this vehicle.

Personal or rented vehicles may also be used for transportation. These vehicles must be properly maintained and insured, and drivers have a clean driving record for the past two years.

For all transportation to and from church events, all participants must wear proper restraints, and travel in a safe manner. Adults shall not transport a single child or youth, alone, who is not related to the driver. There should be at least three people, including the driver, in the vehicle. Youth shall not transport other youth as part of St. Mark's sponsored events. Families are responsible for students' transportation to and from St. Mark's United Methodist Church for events.

Communications

Appropriate Interpersonal Boundaries

Ministry is relational. Leaders and volunteers need to be good examples in regard to modeling healthy relationships, positive behavior, appropriate attire, use of language, encouragement, and affection.

Digital Spaces

In an ever-changing world, the way we interact in digital spaces changes rapidly. The Discipleship team will offer current guidelines for use in digital communications with students and families. These guidelines will be published on the church website along with this policy. All digital communication involving minor students should originate with the staff of St. Mark's. When possible, all St. Mark's group emails should originate with emails using our domain, and utilizing the blind carbon copy field for recipient addresses.

When students are featured online, either on church sponsored social media, church website, or live streaming, last names are not used. In social media publications, names are not used at all with pictures. This is done to help protect student's digital footprint and identity. Included in the youth and children permission slips, parents have the option to request their student not be pictured on social media or any publications. Every effort is made to honor this request.

Drugs and Alcohol

The United Methodist Church Social Principals recognizes devastating impacts of addiction and of the misuse and abuse of legal and illegal substances in the lives of individual users, extended families and entire communities. If anyone is suspected of being under the influence of drugs or alcohol, selling it to another person, encouraging its use, they will be referred for Pastoral Care or counseling. Leaders of events may not be under the influence of drugs or alcohol, or will be asked to leave.

Trainings

All leaders, whether staff or volunteer, at St. Mark's UMC will be required to be trained and up to date in Safer Sanctuaries, CPR/First Aid, mandatory reporting, and their specific program areas.

St. Mark's will provide these trainings annually. The required trainings include:

- Safer Sanctuaries
- Mandatory Reporting
- CPR/First Aid
- Program- specific policies and procedures

Reporting and Response

We hope to never need to respond to allegations of abuse. In the unfortunate event that abuse is suspected or observed, reporting the suspected abuse is a priority. If you have an adult to witness you making the report, that is even better. All people, staff or volunteer, who have responsibility for the care of minor students at St. Mark's UMC are considered mandatory reporters in the state of Arizona. See [ARS 13-3620](#).

If victim is under 18, call the AZ Child Abuse Hotline 1-888-SOS-CHILD (1-888-767-2445) immediately, per mandatory reporting guidelines. Do not discuss with others before calling.

After the legal obligation is fulfilled, a member of the Discipleship Team must be contacted to take the report. A form to be completed with the Discipleship Team member can be found [here](#), and in the office workroom files.

When abuse is suspected, safety of the victim is the primary concern. Once safety is ensured, use Report of Suspected Incident of Abuse form to notify necessary entities. The flowchart of who to contact is found on the back cover of this document.

If the alleged abuse took place on campus, the area needs to be cleared of all people as soon as possible. No one should be allowed to enter or exit until law enforcement arrives. One person should

be designated to stand at any entrance or exit to ensure that the area is not disturbed. (If the alleged abuse is reported from a past action, or not on our campus, this does not need to be done.)

No one will communicate with the media unless authorized by the Senior Pastor or Director of Discipleship. This is to protect not only the church, but to protect all parties involved until there is resolution.

The Discipleship Team member who is taking the report must be sure to follow all steps on the report, and document with time stamps indicated when each step is taken.

If incident is found to be true

Provide ongoing support and care

Utilize pastoral care teams and/or counselor in residence support as well as community resources to ensure victims receive care beyond the immediate time frame of the investigation.

Discuss and record specific plans with the Pastor in charge of Congregational Care or the Lead Pastor to set up Pastoral Care plans for the victim, the victim's family, as well as the abuser and abuser's family if needed. This care can be offered within St. Mark's or via a referral to an outside organization.

Follow all legal obligations

If legal authorities have not already been notified pursuant to mandatory reporting laws (i.e. if the incident takes place between adults), contact legal authorities to report any illegal components of the abuse.

Internal Documentation

Indicate in Breeze and on Volunteer Application file (if applicable) that this person is not approved to work with any vulnerable population. This portion of Breeze is confidential, and only accessible to staff members.

If incident is found to be false

Cooperate Fully with Authorities - Ensure that documentation of the investigation and its findings are retained securely. Confirm with law enforcement or the relevant agency that the case has been officially closed and determined unfounded.

Pastoral Care and Support - Meet with all parties involved (the accused, the accuser, and families, if appropriate) to offer pastoral care, prayer, and counseling support as needed. Encourage and, if necessary, facilitate counseling or mediation through trusted pastoral staff or an external professional.

Reinstatement or Clearance Procedures - If the accused individual was temporarily removed from serving or placed on leave, their eligibility to resume ministry or volunteer work should be reviewed by the Senior Pastor and Director of Discipleship. Document in Breeze (ask Tricia for help if needed) that the individual has been cleared for participation, ensuring that any “not approved to work with vulnerable populations” designation is updated or removed as appropriate.

Communication - Inform relevant staff or ministry leaders of the outcome, maintaining confidentiality and discretion. Only those who were directly impacted or had a need-to-know role in the investigation should be updated on the resolution.

Documentation - The Discipleship Team member who managed the report should finalize all documentation with time stamps and a clear note of the outcome. All records should be stored in a secure, confidential manner in accordance with church policy and legal requirements.

Ongoing Care - Recognizing that false allegations can cause emotional and relational harm to everyone involved. The church should continue to offer care and support where appropriate, prioritizing healing and reconciliation.

Forms

All forms discussed in this policy will be stored in a central file, with the Director of Discipleship in a secure confidential fashion. The necessary forms for this policy are found on the following pages, online [here](#), and in the St. Mark’s office. Each space on campus should have a Report of Suspected Incident of Abuse forms easily accessible.

Date: _____

Volunteer Application and Background Screening Authorization



Best way to Contact: Email Phone Text

Full Name: _____

Other names that have been used by applicant (if any): _____

Social Security number: _____

Preferred Pronouns: _____

Date of Birth: _____

Address: _____

Email: _____

Date Available to Start: _____

Ministries Applied For: _____

Previous Volunteer Experience: _____

Why would you like to work with these ministries? _____

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

If yes, please explain: _____

Drivers license number: _____

Issuing State: _____

Expiration Date: _____

References Please list three individuals who are not related to you by blood or marriage as references. Please list people who have known you at least three years.

Full Name: Best way to Contact: Email Phone

Address:

Email: Phone:

Relationship to reference:

Length of time you have known reference:

Full Name: Best way to Contact: Email Phone

Address:

Email: Phone:

Relationship to reference:

Length of time you have known reference:

Full Name: Best way to Contact: Email Phone

Address:

Email: Phone:

Relationship to reference:

Length of time you have known reference:

During the application process and at any time during the tenure of my employment or volunteer work with St. Mark's United Methodist Church, I hereby authorize an approved commercial service, on behalf of St. Mark's United Methodist Church to procure a criminal background report. This report may be compiled with information from court record repositories, departments of motor vehicles, and any other source required to verify information that I have voluntarily supplied. I understand that I may request a complete and accurate disclosure of the nature and scope of the background verification

I understand that under the St. Mark's United Methodist Church policy, I will be required to undergo a background check each year that I am an employee/volunteer. I further understand that upon completion of the background check, if my Social Security Number were to be blackened out I would be required to complete this form each subsequent year that I am employed/volunteer. Understanding each of these things, I hereby authorize St. Mark's United Methodist Church to not blacken out my Social Security Number and to maintain this "Authorization Form" to be used each subsequent year to obtain the necessary background check.

.....
Signature

Date: _____

Youth Volunteer Application



Best way to Contact: Email Phone Text

Full Name: _____

Other names that have been used by applicant (if any): _____

Preferred Pronouns: _____

Date of Birth: _____

Address: _____

Email: _____

Date Available to Start: _____

Ministries Applied For: _____

Previous Volunteer Experience: _____

Why would you like to work with these ministries? _____

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

If yes, please explain: _____

During the application process and at any time during the tenure of my employment or volunteer work with St. Mark's United Methodist Church, I _____ hereby authorize a St. Mark's United Methodist Church representative to contact my attached references in order to determine eligibility for volunteering.

Signature

References Please list three individuals who are not related to you by blood or marriage as references. Please list people who have known you at least three years.

Full Name: **Best way to Contact:** Email Phone

Address:

Email: **Phone:**

Relationship to reference:

Length of time you have known reference:

Full Name: **Best way to Contact:** Email Phone

Address:

Email: **Phone:**

Relationship to reference:

Length of time you have known reference:

Full Name: **Best way to Contact:** Email Phone

Address:

Email: **Phone:**

Relationship to reference:

Length of time you have known reference:

Reference
Check
Form



Applicant Name:

Reference Name:

Reference Address:

Reference Phone Number:

Reference e-mail:

What is your relationship to the applicant?

How long have you known the applicant?

How well do you know the applicant?

How would you describe the applicant's ability to relate to children and/or youth?

How would you describe the applicant's ability to work with adults?

How would you describe the applicant's leadership abilities?

How would you feel about having the applicant as a volunteer work with your child, youth, or vulnerable adults?

Do you know of any characteristics that would negatively affect the applicant's ability to work with vulnerable people? If so, please describe.

Do you have any knowledge that the applicant has ever been convicted of a crime? If so, please describe.

Is there anything else you would like me to know about the applicant?

Reference Inquiry Completed By:

.....

Signature _____ Date _____
Contacted Via: Email Phone Text

Report of Suspected Incident of Abuse



Name of leader (staff or volunteer) observing or receiving disclosure of abuse:

Victim's Name:

Victim's age/date of birth:

Victim's statement/detailed summary of observations:

Name of person accused as perpetrator:

Relationship of accused to victim (staff volunteer, family member, other):

If victim is under 18, refer to mandatory reporting procedures, call AZ Child Abuse Hotline 1-888-SOS-CHILD (1-888-767-2445) immediately. Do not discuss with others before calling.

After the legal obligation is fulfilled, a member of the Discipleship Team should be contacted to take the report. A form to be completed with the Discipleship Team member can be found [here](#), and in the office workroom files.

Report to AZ Child Abuse Hotline 1-888-SOS-CHILD (1-888-767-2445)

Person making report:

Spoke with:

Date/Time:

Summary of report:

Report to Law Enforcement Agency

Person making report:

Spoke with:

Date/Time:

Summary of report:

.....

.....

Report to Pastor

Person making report:

Name of Pastor:

Date/Time:

Summary of report:

.....

.....

Report to Victim's Parent/Guardian

Person making report:

Name of parent/guardian:

Date/Time:

Summary of report:

.....

.....

Other Contacts:

Name:

Date/Time:

Summary of report:

.....

.....

.....
Signature of Incident Report Date

Ministry Year:

St. Mark's United Methodist Church

grade

PERMISSION SLIP

FOR

CHILDREN AND YOUTH EVENTS

Open Hearts Open Minds Open Doors

student information

Name: _____

Legal Name of Youth: _____ Birth Date: _____

Address: _____ Zip: _____

Email address: _____ Cell phone: _____

Parent/Guardian name and phone: _____

Parent/Guardian name and phone: _____

Emergency contact (other than parent): _____ Phone: _____

Physician's name and phone number: _____

Insurance Carrier: _____ Policy #: _____

Allergies and other conditions of which staff should be aware: _____

Siblings names and grades: _____

Does St. Mark's have permission to use photos/videos online and in publications (full names are not used with photos or videos) YES NO

Does St. Mark's staff have permission to give your student over the counter medication? YES NO
(Please note any preferences or exceptions)

(Please Initial)

I give my permission for St. Mark's United Methodist Church to transport my child to all youth activities that may be held off of the church premises during the current Ministry year. I understand that _____ responsible adults from the church will drive my child to the activity.

Should emergency medical treatment be necessary and I cannot be reached, I authorize any of the adult youth workers to act on my behalf to approve appropriate medical treatment for: _____

I hereby release St. Mark's United Methodist Church and its representatives of any liability for emergency, injury, or death while in transport to and/or participation in a church-sponsored activity. I understand I am responsible for expenses incurred in an emergency involving my child. _____

Parent/Guardian Signature: _____ Date: _____

Glossary of Terms

- **Abuse** - harm or threatened harm to the health and welfare of a child, youth, or vulnerable adult by any person responsible for the health and welfare of that individual. For the purposes of this policy and its implementation, children and youth are individuals who are up to grade 12 (and may be up to and including age 18), and a vulnerable adult is an adult over the age of 17 who is unable to protect themselves from abuse, neglect, or exploitation. It is important to recognize that based on the specific situation, all adults could be considered vulnerable.
- **Ages** -

Child/Children			Youth	Adult
<u>Nursery</u>	<u>PreSchool</u>	<u>Children</u>	<u>6th-12th grades</u>	<u>18 and older</u>
Birth- 3 years	3 years- Kinder Potty trained	Kinder-5th Typically ages 5-12	Typically ages 12-18	May include High School Seniors

- **Appropriate behavior**
 - Appropriate behavior between children or youth and adults means interactions that are safe, respectful, supportive, and clearly bounded—fostering trust and growth while protecting the well-being of young people. It ensures that adults act as role models, mentors, and protectors, never crossing lines that could harm or confuse a child or youth emotionally, physically, or spiritually.
 - Appropriate behavior between adults refers to conduct that reflects mutual respect, clear boundaries, honesty, and consideration for others’ dignity and well-being. It creates a sense of safety, trust, and professionalism in all kinds of relationships—personal, social, or work-related.
- **Interruptible and Observable**- the space being used will be easily accessible and have line of sight with others. This may include ensuring unlocked doors and open window coverings, when considered safe.
- **Leaders** - anyone personally responsible for supervising and overseeing a specific church-related function, event, or activity. This includes both paid staff and volunteers.
- **Neglect** - The failure to provide necessary care, supervision, or protection that a person—especially a child, elder, or dependent individual—needs for their health, safety, and well-being. It can be intentional or unintentional, but it always results in harm or risk of harm.
- **Parent or guardian** - means any parent, stepparent, foster parent, grand-parent, or appointed guardian with general responsibility for the health, education, or welfare of a child or vulnerable adult.
- **Public Space** - Spaces that are observable (3rd parties can easily see into the space) and interruptible (doors are unlocked, and 3rd parties can easily walk in to observe interactions). This can also be outdoors, where others can see the interaction.

- **Sexual contact** - the intentional touching of the intimate parts or the clothing covering the intimate parts of a youth, child, or vulnerable adult.
- **Sexual exploitation** - allowing, permitting, or encouraging a vulnerable adult, child, or youth to engage in prostitution or photographing, filming, or creating electronic or computer-generated images depicting a child, youth, or vulnerable adult engaged in actual or suggestive sexual conduct.
- **Sexual harassment** - means any sexual advance or demand, either verbal or physical, which is perceived by the recipient as demeaning, intimidating, or coercive.
- **Staff** - means any employee of the ministry. This can include both paid and unpaid staff members, but is particularly used in reference to paid employees.
- **Volunteer** - a person who participates as a leader or assists a leader in activities relating to any event or ministry without compensation.
- **Vulnerable adult** - Adults 18 years or older with impairments developmentally, physically, emotionally, or mentally. Some examples may include: ministries for the sick, hospice care, homeless, special needs, prison inmates, etc. Also includes adults who have been injured and need assistance. Situationally, all adults can be considered vulnerable.

2025 Digital Spaces Addendum

Digital Spaces In an ever-changing world, interactions between adults and minors also change. The Discipleship team will offer current guidelines for use in digital communications with students and families. These guidelines will be published on the church website along with this policy. All digital communication involving minor students should originate with the staff of St. Mark's. When possible, all St. Mark's group emails should originate with emails using our domain, and utilizing the blind carbon copy field for recipient addresses.

Children

For nursery and elementary students, digital communication should be restricted to church representatives and parents or guardians.

This can be done via e-mail or text messaging.

Social media connections should not be made with children.

Youth

Participants in our Youth Ministry program rely almost exclusively on digital spaces for communications.

Adults

This rule does not apply to adult ministries.

What to do when you suspect abuse

