

# **WESTON UNITED METHODIST CHURCH**

## **SAFE SANCTUARIES POLICY**

### **OUR CALLING**

Weston United Methodist Church located at 533 Main Street, Weston Missouri is a sacred place where God's people of all ages come together for worship, study, service and fellowship. The ministries of Weston United Methodist Church seek to share the Good News of the Gospel of Christ and make disciples of Jesus Christ that all who enter may come to know God and experience the love of Christ.

### **OUR MANDATE**

The disturbing and traumatic rise of physical and sexual abuse of children, youth and vulnerable adults has claimed the attention of our nation and society. Abuse is any sexual contact, indecent exposure, or communication for immoral purposes, as well as physical abuses such as corporal punishment or physical assault. The law recognizes that no minors can consent to sexual contact or physical abuse because of their age and vulnerability. The following statements reflect the commitment of Weston United Methodist Church to provide a safe environment for all children, youth and vulnerable adults and church workers who participate in church sponsored ministries.

Weston's UMC takes seriously its responsibility to provide a safe and nurturing environment for children, youth and vulnerable adults who participate in our ministries. In keeping with our covenant relationship with God, we honor our Lord and all who seek Him, by doing justice, loving-kindness and walking humbly with Him. (Micah 6:8). All volunteers and employees in leadership roles are living out their vows we took in baptism to nurture our children and youth in the Christian faith. Every leader plays a key role in fostering the spiritual development of individuals and families in a safe environment in our church community. The church affirms this position and will not tolerate any abuse by its workers whether paid employees or volunteers.

### **OUR PURPOSE**

The purpose of this document is to ensure that the church members and staff of Weston United Methodist Church (UMC) do all they can to provide a safe and secure environment for nursery, preschoolers, children, youth, and all vulnerable persons entrusted to our care. The following policies and procedures are for the protection of our children, youth, employees, volunteers and our entire church family at Weston United Methodist Church, Weston, Missouri. By establishing these policies and procedures, we demonstrate our commitment to provide a safe environment for our children and youth as they grow in their relationship with God. Although it is unlikely that we can completely prevent abuse in every circumstance, it is possible for us to greatly reduce the risk of abuse by following these procedures.

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### OUR COVENANT

In an effort to provide a safe community, Weston UMC requires all church employees and volunteers to commit themselves to the Safe Sanctuaries Policy for the Protection of Children, Youth and Vulnerable Adults adopted by the Administrative Council of this Church. This policy does not preclude or prohibit the reporting of suspected abuse occurring outside the parameters of this policy.

- We pledge to conduct ourselves in a manner consistent with the teachings of Christ and that we will guard our thoughts and tongues, will refrain from any behaviors which corrupt our witness for Christ, and that our actions and choices will reflect prudence, purity of heart, and an earnest love for the will of God.
- We will follow reasonable safety measures in the selection and recruitment of workers.
- We will implement "common sense" procedures in our ministries to protect those vulnerable.
- We will educate our workers with children and youth regarding the use of appropriate procedures.
- We will inform parents of our policies and procedures.
- We will clearly define procedures for reporting a suspected incident of abuse that conforms to the requirements of the laws of the State of Missouri.
- We will prepare to respond to the media should such an incident occur.

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## SAFE SANCTUARIES IMPLEMENTATION PROCEDURES

### DEFINITIONS

Adults – Persons over 22 Years of Age\*

*\* The legal age of majority for the State of Missouri is 18, however Weston's Safe Sanctuaries Policy and Procedures and Missouri Conference Safe Sanctuary policies stipulate that an adult be at least 22 years of age. This adherence ensures a 3-year gap exists between the youth in an activity and the adults responsible for the welfare and protection of children, youth and vulnerable adults at these events.*

Children – Persons Birth through Grade 6

Youth – Persons attending Grades 7 - 12

Vulnerable Adult - an individual, age 18 or over, who, because of age, developmental disability, mental illness, or physical handicap requires supervision or personal care and lacks the personal and social skills required to live independently.

Staff – Any paid member identified through election or appointment holding responsibility or authority within Weston UMC and/or the District Conference.

Volunteer – Any unpaid person not appointed official responsibilities or authorities within Weston UMC and/or the District Conference who donates their time, skills and efforts in which a Child, Youth or Vulnerable Adult may participate in.

Key Leader – Any adult (Staff or Volunteer) with primary responsibility of overseeing, leading or coordinating the event or activity in which a Child, Youth or Vulnerable Adult may participate in.

Assistant – Any person with secondary responsibilities in providing support in the event or activity in which a Child, Youth or Vulnerable Adult may participate in. This person can be an Adult or Youth.

### GENERAL PROCEDURES

- 1) The Church Council approves Weston's Safe Sanctuaries policy. This policy is on file at the District Conference and available to the church members.
  - a) Staff and Volunteers of Children, Youth and Vulnerable Adults will receive a copy of Weston's Safe Sanctuaries Policy.

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- b) Parents or Guardians of children, youth and vulnerable adults may pick up a copy of the Safe Sanctuaries Policy in each classroom. The policy is also available for download at: <http://www.westonumc.com>
  - c) The Safe Sanctuaries Policy will be placed in new member packets, available for pick-up in the church information area, and available online.
  - d) A committee of four people will review the Weston's Safe Sanctuaries Policy and Implementation Manual every two years. The committee will consist of:
    - i. Lay Representative of the Staff Parish Relations
    - ii. Lay Representative of the Board of Trustees
    - iii. Lay Representative of the Education Committee
    - iv. Lay Representative of the Youth Ministries Team
- 2) Weston UMC will adopt a tiered approach in vetting Staff and Volunteers that work with Children, Youth and Vulnerable Adults. This tiered approach allows a common sense approach in balancing safety with written policy to all parties. The intent is to provide a safe environment surrounding the children, youth and vulnerable adults at any Weston UMC event but still allowing a maximum number of volunteers to assist. It is our goal that at least one adult will have completed a background check and trained in Safe Sanctuaries policies and procedures.
- a) Staff – These persons will be trained on the implementation of Weston's Safe Sanctuaries Policy, complete Missouri Conference Safe Sanctuary training, and required to have a background check. The Missouri Conference Safe Sanctuary Online Training is located at: <http://moumethodist.org>. Once trained, the certification will be valid according to the policies set by the UMC Missouri Conference, which is currently four years.
  - b) Key Leaders – These persons will be trained on the implementation of Weston's Safe Sanctuaries Policy, complete Missouri Conference Safe Sanctuary training, and required to have a background check. The Missouri Conference Safe Sanctuary Online Training is located at: <http://moumethodist.org>. Once trained, the certification will be valid according to the policies set by the UMC Missouri Conference, which is currently four years. Persons in this category will be the Sunday School Teachers, Key Vacation Bible School Leaders, and Youth Leaders.
  - c) Assistants – Volunteers (e.g. chaperones, VBS assistants) are those who assist infrequently (i.e. 1-2 times a month or less than 12 times per year) at event where children, youth or vulnerable adults may participate in. Weston UMC will provide specific training of Weston Safe Sanctuaries Policy and Procedures prior to specific events (e.g. VBS). Weston UMC will use the attendance roster from the training session

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as confirmation that the assistant received the instruction. If the volunteer exceeds the above frequency, volunteers on a regular basis, or assumes more of a leadership position within this ministry, they will be required to be certified as a Key Leader.

- 3) Volunteers and staff who work with children, youth and vulnerable adults as defined by Paragraph 2, will submit a background check through the Missouri Conference of the United Methodist Church.
  - a) Background checks for Weston's Staff and Key Leaders will be paid for through the church budget. Background checks for volunteers for other organizations using the church's facilities (e.g. Boy Scouts, Girl Scouts, other churches) are the responsibility of that organization.
  - b) Personnel must renew Safe Sanctuary training & certification every 4 years, according to the Missouri UMC Conference Policy. This includes an updated background check. Personnel can check currency of Safe Sanctuary certification at the Missouri Conference website: <http://moumethodist.org>.
  - c) Persons who do not hold certification will not be allowed to serve as Staff, Key Leaders or Assistants with children, youth and vulnerable adults.
- 4) Facility doors will be closed when not in use, including classrooms, closets and library. Christian education classrooms will be opened 10-15 minutes prior to the Christian Education hour and closed 10-15 minutes following the Christian Education hour. Doors may be shut during the instructional period of the class to facilitate learning.
- 5) Hallway windows will not be covered when rooms are in use by children or youth.
- 6) All staff and volunteers will know the location of emergency aid kits and have telephone access for emergency medical assistance.
  - a) Local access telephones are available on the main floor and in the Kitchen located in the basement of the church.
  - b) First Aid kits are available above the coat racks on the main floor next to the library.
- 7) No fewer than two volunteers will be present at all children and youth events, on or off campus.
  - a) At least one adult, 22 years of age or older, will be present at every event and received training in Safe Sanctuaries policies and procedures.

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- b) A minimum, 1:10, of adult/volunteer workers to children/youth will be maintained in each situation involving the supervision of children and youth.
  - c) When it is not feasible to have two volunteers in every room, such as when a large group has divided into smaller groups, a floater will check in on each group.
  - d) Volunteers who serve as teachers and leaders will be at least three years older than the oldest child or youth in the class or event they are teaching or leading.
  - e) Assistants will be a minimum of 12 years of age or graduated from 6th grade according to the school calendar year and at least three years older than the oldest child/youth in the class they are assisting in to volunteer. An Adult will be present (directly or indirectly) if the assistant's age is between 12 to 22 years of age when they are volunteering.
  - f) There will be at least two adults of each gender present at co-ed overnight events. At single gender overnight events, at least two or more adults present will be of the same gender as the participating children/youth.
- 8) Children/youth attending a church-sponsored event may not leave prior to the ending of that event without previous contact between the parents and the staff/volunteer person in charge.
- a) Children will only be released to persons other than parents if prior contact has occurred between the parents and the staff person in charge.
  - b) Permission forms will be required for each off-campus event involving children and youth.
- 9) Liability insurance coverage: Weston's Trustees shall maintain liability insurance coverage of at least \$1,000,000 per event/\$3,000,000 for activities both on and off church property. Liability insurance should include at least \$300,000 coverage for sexual misconduct claims.

**PROCEDURES SPECIFIC TO CHILDREN**

- 1) Children will attend the appropriate grade/age level equivalent to the grade/age level they attend in school or preschool.
- a) Any child in Pre-Kindergarten or above should attend the same grade level of Christian education as they attend in school. Any exceptions to this policy on placement will be discussed with the Key Leader, the parent/guardian and the education director.

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- b) Promotion occurs in late August. Children move to the next grade level at that time.
- 2) Children Birth through Pre-Kindergarten will be signed in/out of any activity by parent or guardian. It is recommended that signing in and out occur five minutes prior to and five minutes after an event. If a child is not picked up within 10 minutes of the close of Sunday school, that child will be signed into the Nursery.
  - a) Pre-Kindergarten to 4th Grade may not be released to a sibling less than 18 years of age without written parental permission.
  - b) Children in Grades 5 - 12 may sign themselves in and out of a classroom or event in the presence of a parent or other adult guardian.
- 3) Children not currently signed into a classroom or event is the responsibility of their parents and must be attended to by their parents. Children must be supervised at all times while on church property.
- 4) Parents are encouraged to remain on the property while their children are signed into Weston's ministries. Parents who leave the property while their children are signed into classes or events will provide emergency contact information.
- 5) Like other class rolls, the Sunday school sign-in sheets will become a part of the permanent attendance records and Sunday school archives.
- 6) During Christian education class time, children will use the nearest restroom. A floater or assistant will provide supervision in the common areas.

**PROCEDURES FOR REPORTING INCIDENTS OF ABUSE**

- 1) According to the laws of the State of Missouri, all persons are mandatory reporters of child abuse.
  - a) If any person learns of or witnesses an instance of abuse, that person shall immediately report the alleged incident of abuse or suspected abuse to the appropriate county or state authorities. Contact 911 to report the incident to the local police for immediate action.
  - b) Call the Missouri Child Abuse Hotline at 1-800-392-3738. The Children's Division staffs this hotline 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, and 365 days a year. They will take information from you and respond to child abuse and neglect. If you live outside Missouri and want to report abuse or neglect of a Missouri child, call (573) 751-3448.

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Code Section	210.110, et seq.
What Constitutes Abuse	Any physical injury, sexual abuse, emotional abuse inflicted on child other than by accidental means by caregiver (spanking in a reasonable manner not included)
Mandatory Reporting Required By	Physician, medical examiner, dentist, chiropractor, coroner, optometrist, nurse, hospital or clinic personnel, any other health practitioner, psychologist, social worker, mental health professional, day care center worker, juvenile officer, probation or parole officer, teacher, school official, law enforcement officer, minister
Basis of Report of Abuse/neglect	Reasonable cause to suspect that a child has been or may be subjected to abuse or neglect or observes such conditions or circumstances that would reasonably result in abuse or neglect
To Whom Reported	Missouri Division of Family Services
Penalty for Failure to Report or False Reporting	Class A misdemeanor

- c) Incidents of abuse or reasonably suspected incidents of abuse of children, youth or vulnerable adults will also be reported as soon as possible to the Pastor or another Weston's staff member, and to the Heartland North District Superintendent of the Missouri Conference of the United Methodist Church at 615-893-5886.
- 2) The person reporting the incident will document, in writing, all known facts and circumstances and make a report that documents all steps taken in the course of handling the reported incident using the appropriate forms.
- 3) The pastor and/or staff member will document all actions taken in reporting the incident of abuse using the appropriate forms.
- 4) The confidentiality of all persons involved will be safeguarded.

**RESPONDING TO ALLEGATIONS OF ABUSE**

- 1) Every allegation will be taken seriously. Adequate care and respect must be offered to the alleged victims and alleged perpetrators until the allegation can be substantiated or cleared.



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- 2) The safety and security of the alleged victim must be safeguarded before the person accused of abuse is confronted.
- 3) The parents/guardians of the suspected victim will be notified immediately.
- 4) All procedures listed in the previous section on Reporting will be strictly followed.
- 5) All records relating to the matter will be maintained in confidential files.
- 6) All efforts in handling the situation will be carefully documented.
- 7) The Pastor or his/her designee will notify the liability insurer and the legal counsel for the Church about the alleged incident.
- 8) The Pastor will be the sole spokesperson for Weston's United Methodist Church and the District Superintendent will be the sole spokesperson for the district insofar as media inquiries are concerned.
- 9) Any person accused must be treated with dignity and support. That person will be immediately relieved of further responsibilities, as circumstances dictate, until the allegations are cleared or substantiated.