

# **SAFE SANCTUARY POLICY**

## **MT TAM CHURCH**

### **Introduction**

Jesus spoke of the importance of young people being included and provided for within the community of faith. Our hope and belief today is that the church is a place where children and youth will find the unconditional love and care they need to grow and thrive.

Boundary violations, including sexual, physical and emotional, often happen in settings where children, youth, and vulnerable adults should be able to feel safe - homes, schools, camps, and the church. Abuse does occur in churches, large and small, urban and rural. It is a problem, which cuts across all economic, cultural, and racial lines.

In April 1996, the General Conference of The United Methodist Church adopted a resolution aimed at reducing the risk of abuse of children, youth, and vulnerable adults in the church. As Christians we fail in our responsibilities if we neglect to take adequate precautions against abuse in our churches. It is unlikely that we can completely prevent abuse in every situation, but it is possible for us to greatly reduce the risk by following an effective policy of prevention.

### **Purpose**

God has given us a sacred opportunity and great responsibility to nurture and protect children, youth and vulnerable adults, and the persons who work with them. Mt. Tam UMC bears affirmative responsibility to create an environment of safe sanctuary for the vulnerable. This is the purpose of this “Safe Sanctuary” policy. The second purpose of this policy is to protect our staff, both paid and volunteer, from potential allegations of abuse.

### **Screening Procedures**

Careful screening is one way to prevent the abuse of children, youth, and vulnerable adults. It can be time consuming and expensive, but provides some assurance that the most reliable, committed and experienced staff and volunteers are in place for every program that involves children, youth, and vulnerable adults.

It is the child safety policy of the church that:

1. At the time each leader is engaged for a church-sponsored class or activity involving children or youth, there will be specific, individualized consideration of the extent of any risk posed to child safety.
2. At the time any staff, paid or volunteer, is engaged for substantial or regular work primarily involving children or youth, there will be a background check to discover any reasonably accessible information material affecting child safety.
3. There will be periodic training for leaders on child safety issues. The content of the training will be guided by the advice of the General Conference of the United Methodist Church that local churches should develop and implement an ongoing education plan for its leaders on: the reality of child abuse; risk factors leading to child abuse; and strategies for prevention.
4. There will be two-deep adult leadership whenever possible.

5. Any leader primarily responsible for a group of children or youth will be at least five years older than the members of that group.
6. A parent will be informed in advance and given the opportunity to opt out of any situation involving a single leader and a single child or youth alone together.
7. To the maximum extent practical, doors and blinds will be open, so as to minimize the extent to which leaders and children or youth are secluded from others.
8. Church leaders and staff will be accessible to parents, prepared to respond effectively regarding concerns about child safety. They will be prepared to advise parents, youth and children of individuals and agencies (within and without the church) to contact for advice and help with suspected incidents of abuse.

The following shall be MINIMUM standards:

All adults, volunteer or staff persons, who have regular and direct contact with children, youth, and vulnerable adults shall be required to register with [safegatherings.com](http://safegatherings.com) or other current approved Annual Conference screening procedure and submit their personal contact information to the church.

The policy shall be implemented in the following manner:

- All staff persons and volunteers, who have regular and direct contact with children, will submit to the screening procedures as outlined by this policy.
- All new applicants, persons having a break in service of one or more years, and those persons who have not been screened in three years since their last background check, shall submit to the screening procedures again.
- The Director of Children, Youth and Family Ministries shall make sure all staff, volunteer or paid, have been approved by [safegatherings.com](http://safegatherings.com) (or other approved procedure.)
- All records are confidential.

## **Procedures to Follow in the Event of a Boundary Violation**

1. If an incident of boundary violation is reported, the adult who becomes aware of the incident reports immediately to the Pastor and Director of Children, Youth and Family Ministries and a report must be made to the appropriate state or county agency (See “Reporting” on page 4 for the process).
2. The Pastor and/or Director first inform parents/family and handle the immediate needs of the child or vulnerable adult.
3. The Pastor and/or Director will take action to protect any person at risk and deal fairly with any accused person, removing them straight away from the immediate context, room or situation, removing them from contact with the victim(s) for a time to be determined by the Pastor and/or Director and instructing the accused person not to be in contact with the victim(s) and/or their family by any means of communication. Inform the accused person that all communications about the incident will be done through the pastor, Director and/or SPRC Chair.
4. Once steps 1-3 have been completed, the following guidelines shall be used to direct the process forward. Due to context and individual circumstances, there may need to be adjustment of the order of steps or additional steps taken. In general, however, follow-through shall be:
  - a. Clarify the allegations:
    1. Speak directly with the victim and/or their advocate, witnesses and people with direct knowledge of the situation. The focus here is to attempt to determine exactly what happened in the situation from their perspective and experience.

2. Speak directly with the person who allegedly violated the boundary. The focus here is to attempt to determine exactly what happened in the situation from their perspective and experience.
- b. Chronicle all conversations carefully, either through note taking or recording the conversations. Permission for recording must be received prior to the conversation by all involved.
  1. Keep a record of all allegations and conversations. This includes recordings, notes and agreements. This file will be kept confidential and access is granted only to the Pastor, Director and SPRC chair and members. File materials will be stored in the Pastor's office.
- c. Once the allegations are made clear and recorded, they will be the responsibility of the Pastor and the Chair of the Staff-Parish Relations Committee (SPRC). The SPRC will meet immediately to discuss possible actions from the recorded information.
- d. As soon as possible after reporting the alleged action, the Pastor and Chair of SPRC will confer to decide what to do with the alleged boundary violator. If the violator is a church staff member, options include: immediate leave, supervised work or an alternative work assignment. If the violator is a lay church member, options include: asking the person to absent themselves from church worship and events, creating a companioning program so that another lay person is with that person at all times, and/or providing individual spiritual support in place of their attendance at church events.
- e. If appropriate, the appropriate social service agencies and/or law enforcement shall be contacted to report the violation. If appropriate, the District Superintendent of the Bay District of the California-Nevada Conference of The United Methodist Church will be notified.
- f. Confidentiality must be maintained at all levels and steps of the process. Informing the alleged victim of actions in a timely manner is essential. Arranging for support and/or counseling for all persons involved is critical. Arranging for support and/or counseling for all persons involved is critical, as is providing regular, on-going and additional pastoral support and care, for the victims, alleged perpetrator and members of the staff and SPRC.
- g. Once the SPRC makes a decision of a plan of action, there are a number of options for moving forward. These include, not necessarily in chronological order:
  - a. consulting with an employment or other kind of attorney for legal advice.
  - b. consulting with other professionals in the field, such as consultants for boundary violation or a therapist.
  - c. contacting the office of the Bishop to engage the Bishop's Healing Ministry Response Team for congregations.
  - d. In terms of informing the people involved:
    1. If the accused person is a staff member, they shall be informed first of their employment status. This will be done as quickly as possible, in an appropriate and timely manner. Then, the victim and family will be informed of the SPRC's decision and action.
    2. If the accused person is a lay member of the congregation, the best attempt will be made to inform both the accused and the victim in approximately the same time frame.
      - a. All attempts will be made to follow-up in these ways:
        1. Keep in contact with the victims and family for pastoral care.
        2. Keep in contact with the accused for pastoral care and to make sure that person is acting appropriately toward the victims.
        3. Assure that pastoral and/or psychological and spiritual support is on-going and being offered to all involved.

## **Reporting**

According to California law, clergy members and ministers are mandated reports. Volunteers, even if engaging in work with children, are not mandated reports, though they are encouraged to report known or suspected instances of abuse or neglect that involves a child or youth under the age of 18.

At any Mt. Tam Church event, if an adult suspects the abuse or neglect of a child, youth, or vulnerable adult, whether it has occurred at the event or prior to the event, that person must report his/her suspicions to the leader of the event, the pastor and the children, youth and families minister and together they must ascertain the details needed to make an accurate report. This report must be made within 36 hours. The report should include the following information, if obtainable:

1. The name, address, age and sex of the alleged victim;
2. The name and address of the alleged victim's parents or other person responsible for his/her care;
3. The nature and extent of the alleged abuse or neglect;
4. Any evidence of previously known or suspected abuse or neglect of the alleged victim or their siblings;
5. The name, address and relationship, if known, of the person who is alleged to have perpetrated the abuse or neglect; and any other information known to the person making the report that would be helpful to the investigation of the alleged abuse.

The pastor and/or children, youth and families minister shall contact the appropriate state or county agency to file the abuse report and forward the aforementioned information to the agency as soon as possible. The person making the report should keep a copy of the report and consider it confidential information. Another report should be sent to the staff person overseeing the event at which the alleged abuse occurred. For Marin County, the phone number for the emergency response child abuse reporting is 415-473-7153.

The alleged perpetrators of the abuse will be required to refrain from all events involving children, youth and vulnerable adults until the incident report is resolved. In any removal of a person from any activities, care must be taken to handle this in a discreet manner, recognizing that an investigation is still being conducted.

## **Response Plan**

A quick, compassionate and unified response to an alleged incident of child abuse is expected. All allegations will be taken seriously. In all cases of reported or observed abuse in a children's activity, the entire staff of that activity shall be at the service of all official investigating agencies.

The Interim Conference Director of Communications, Cate Monaghan (916-374-1529, [catem@calnevumc.org](mailto:catem@calnevumc.org)), or his/her designee, is the only person(s) authorized to make statements to representatives of the media. All requests for statements should be directed to the Director of Communications. Training in how to handle media requests should be a regular part of staff training. A spirit of cooperation in helping the media find the "official spokesperson" is often helpful.

If the allegation is against a staff person or volunteer or if it occurred in the course of a Conference activity, the staff person in charge of the activity and the Conference Crisis Management Team shall be contacted immediately. The Conference Crisis Management Team will advise the Conference's insurance carrier.

In either case, pastoral support will be available to all persons involved with the incident as indicated.