

### **Introduction**

God calls us to make our churches safe places, protecting children and other vulnerable persons from harm. God calls us to create communities of faith where children and adults grow safe and strong. The Main Street Methodist Church- Abbeville (aka Main Street or Main Street Church) is committed to providing a safe and secure environment for all children, youth, vulnerable adults, and volunteers who participate in ministries and activities sponsored by the church. Our policy 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.

### **Purpose**

The leaders of Main Street Methodist Church-Abbeville are committed to providing an environment which is as safe as possible for children and youth who attend church, or any church sponsored activity or event; and to take the necessary precautions to protect church leaders, staff, and volunteers from allegations of abuse. These policies are written to demonstrate our total commitment to the physical, emotional, and spiritual safety of all our children, youth, and vulnerable adults.

Thus, we adopt this policy for the prevention of abuse of children and youth in our church.

### **I. Definitions**

#### **A. "Child," "Youth," "Adult," and "Vulnerable Adult"**

1. Child is anyone age of 11 or under.
2. Youth is anyone not a "child" and under the age of 18. For our purposes, this will include anyone who is over the age of 18 years old, involved in youth events while in high school or the equivalent.
3. Vulnerable adults are over 18 years of age and have been identified as having special needs. *In this policy when the word minor, child, or youth is utilized it is implied to include vulnerable adults.*
3. Adult is anyone 18 years of age or older.

#### **B "Paid Staff Person," "Unscreened Volunteer," and "Screened Adult Volunteer"**

1. Paid Staff Person is someone paid by the church, overseen by the Pastor/Parish Relations Committee, and is screened.
2. Unscreened Volunteer is someone who has not completed the Safe Sanctuaries training, had a background check, completed application/covenant, or had their references checked. They must volunteer in the close presence of a Screened Adult Volunteer or Paid Staff Person. Unscreened Volunteers are encouraged to go through the screening process to become a Screened Adult Volunteer.
3. A Screened Adult Volunteer is a volunteer who has completed the Safe Sanctuaries training, had a background check, completed application/covenant, and had their



references checked. They may or may not be members, but they must be regular attendees for at least six months and must be 21 years of age.

C. “Church functions” or “Ministry Events”

These are activities sponsored and supported by Main Street Church for the purposes related to its ministry and mission and are expected to adhere accordingly.

D. “Abuse”

Child/Youth abuse is non-accidental physical or emotional injury caused by the acts or omissions of the child’s parent(s) or any adult(s) or caretaker(s) and includes the following:

1. Physical abuse: Non-accidental physical injury to child/youth.
2. Physical neglect: Failure on the part of the child’s/youth’s caretaker to provide adequate food, clothing shelter or supervision.
3. Emotional mistreatment: Abuse in which a person exposes a child/youth to spoken or unspoken violence or emotional cruelty.
4. Sexual abuse: Sexual exploitation of a child/youth.

**II. Staff and Volunteer Recruitment and Selection Guidelines**

A. Age

Paid staff and screened volunteers who work with children and youth in any position of authority must be at least 21 years of age. All volunteers should be at least 5 years older than the age of the persons they are working to serve. Unscreened volunteers must be at least in the sixth grade or older.

B. Workers with Children and Youth

Main Street Methodist Church will not use anyone as a paid staff or in a supervisory position for children or youth unless they have completed a satisfactory background check.

C. Application and Covenant

All applicants must complete and sign an application form. Paid staff and screened volunteers must give explicit permission to check references and background information and agree to and sign Main Street’s “Acknowledgement and Covenant.” New applicants must complete the Initial application and those applicants renewing their application can submit a shortened renewal form. If a volunteer has not been active for a significant time (as determined by the Safe Sanctuaries Coordinator/Pastor/SPRC chair), they will be asked to complete an Initial application to include reference checks.

D. Reference Checks

Two non-related character references will be required for all new paid staff and new volunteer applicants. The references will be completed by the Safe Sanctuaries Coordinator or the Pastor and method of completion is through mailing, email, or online form but can be completed by phone, text, or in person. A record of the reference should be kept in their file. Renewal applicants are not required to submit references.

E. Background Checks

Criminal background checks shall be made of all clergy, paid staff, and screened volunteers, to the extent permitted by law. Individuals who have been convicted of felony



convictions (violence and drugs other than misdemeanor possession), or offenses involving children, may not work or volunteer in any church-sponsored activity or program for babies, preschoolers, children, youth, or vulnerable adults. If an applicant discloses that they have been reported for abuse or misconduct or have been the subject of an investigation for abuse or misconduct but were not convicted, the Safe Sanctuaries Coordinator will secure a reference in relation to the incident and with the assistance of the pastor and/or SPRC chair, will discern the suitability of that volunteer on a case by case basis. A DUI conviction within the last 5 years will exclude a person from driving only. Background Checks will be administered to volunteers who are renewing their application every 3 years.

F. Holy Conversation

Each screened and unscreened volunteer will engage in Holy Conversation with the Safe Sanctuaries coordinator and/or the Pastor to ensure that the volunteer is a good fit for the ministry area in which they are volunteering and to ensure that the references obtained match the character of the individual seeking to volunteer. Holy Conversation will continue as needed throughout the time of volunteering and especially should information provided in the initial or renewal application change at any time.

G. Confidentiality of Information

Main Street will keep confidential all information received in the application process. Applicant has a right to challenge any information. All information will be stored in a locked location with access given to the Safe Sanctuaries Coordinator, the pastor, and chair of SPRC.

**III. Ongoing Education of Persons Who Work with Children and Youth**

The church shall ensure that regularly scheduled training focused on current issues of reducing the risk of child abuse is available to and received by those working with children and youth. Volunteers will be trained every three years. Attendance at this training shall be required of all paid staff members and screened volunteers who work consistently with children and/or youth, both initial applicants and those renewing. The training should include:

- A. Main Street's Safe Sanctuaries Policy.
- B. Behaviors or other indicators which may signal problems.
- C. The facts and misconceptions related to child sexual abuse, including basic characteristics of an abuser, the grooming process of the offender, and key indicators of child sexual abuse.
- D. Appropriate behaviors for teachers and leaders of children and youth events and activities.
- E. Requirements of SC state law for reporting incidents of abuse.
- F. Procedures for response to incidents or allegations of abuse and for reporting such incidents.
- G. Best Practices for working with different age groups.
- H. Main Street Church's policies, practices, and procedures



We recommend and urge all paid staff and screened volunteers to be trained in safety, first aid, evacuation procedures, gait belt, LifeVac, and use of fire extinguishers and fire blankets. Every effort shall be made to have at least one person certified in CPR and First Aid (from a nationally recognized body such as American Red Cross) present at each church activity or event.

#### **IV. Supervision of Children and Youth - General**

This policy applies to activities involving children and youth such as Sunday School, Children's Church, Vacation Bible School, Student/Youth events, and other activities or outings at the church or away.

- A. Effort should be made so that minors participating in a church sponsored activity or event where the parent/guardian is not present would have a Medical Release form on file.
- B. Upon arrival for activity and events, minors will be explicitly transferred to the screened volunteers and then released only to the appropriate parent or guardian or designated person at the end of an activity or event. For Nursery and Children's Church, our volunteers will utilize the provided check-in form which includes allergies, ages, parent/guardian names, emergency contact information, and names of individuals that are allowed to pick up the minor.
- C. There should be a minimum of 2 volunteers whenever there is an activity/event involving children. It is preferable that both volunteers would be screened, but one minimum is required. When two adults are not available, the door should always remain open and the volunteer must be screened. Individuals should avoid unnecessary situations where an adult is alone and in private surroundings with a child or youth. In those situations, the best-case scenario is to utilize the "Three Person Rule" in that anytime an adult is with minors that a total of three individuals are present. When possible, children should be escorted to and from the door of the bathroom facilities or when otherwise leaving the room by either one of the volunteers or by a designated floating person who checks on all classrooms.
- D. When reasonably feasible, each room set aside for children/youth should have a door with a window. Half doors will be utilized in the Children's Church and Nursery areas to prevent young ones from wandering outside the classroom.
- E. Paid staff and volunteers should never remove a child or youth from church property, or take him or her home, without the explicit verbal or written knowledge and approval of the parent/guardian.
- F. 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. No staff or volunteer shall give gifts to an individual child or youth without the prior knowledge of the parent(s) or clergy.
- G. At large scale events such as VBS, we will work with the Safety Committee to ensure that we have trained monitors in place for the duration of the event.



**V. Trip and Retreat Supervision**

Those in charge of the trip or retreat should be mindful the following requirements, in addition to applying their own wisdom to the needs of any given occasion. When there is question, the supervising adults should seek consultation with the pastor, ministry leader, and/or the administrative council chair.

- A. All adults providing supervision for trips and retreats should be screened adults. There will be at least two screened adults present for all trips, retreats, and other events where the children and/or youth gather overnight at, or away from, the church campus. At an overnight event, there should be at least one screened adult that is the same gender of those present. Other adults are welcome to participate in trips and retreats in other roles (presenter, food prep, etc.).
- B. There should be an adequate ratio of screened adults to children and youth to ensure proper supervision.
- C. All minors being transported away from the church must have a Medical Release Form on file and it should be updated annually. For youth, this will include a signed covenant form that outlines the commitment to maintaining a safe, church family atmosphere.
- D. The screened adults in charge of minors for each trip or retreat shall carry a signed parental permission slip specific for that event (aka bus form).
- E. When possible, overnight accommodations should be in a group, multiple bed lodge, or bunkroom setting and must be divided by gender. Anytime adults are present in the sleeping area with minors, all efforts should be made to ensure that the three-person rule is applied. When making overnight accommodations, the safest form of available lodging that reduces the most risk should be arranged.

**If a hotel setting is the best option for accommodations:**

- A. Separate rooms for adults and minors should be assigned based on gender. Adult individuals who are married (along with their biological children) are allowed to stay together.
- B. Room assignments should be made so that an adult room is between and amongst the rooms of minors.
- C. Screened adults should develop and implement a plan to monitor the halls in the night.
- D. Adults will implement room checks at night-time curfew by a screened adult the same gender as those being checked. Adults will communicate clear expectations to minors to stay in their room until designated time the next morning.
- E. All minors should have an explicit, clear, and written way to contact adults in case of emergency or as needs arise overnight.
- F. Adults should only enter the assigned room for youth and youth should only enter the assigned room for adults when three individuals or more are present.
- G. A hotel should be selected where the rooms open to the interior of the building (i.e., do not open to the outside).

**VI. Transportation**

All Main Street sponsored activities that require transportation must adhere to the Main Street Transportation Policy that includes specific guidelines and requirements for the transportation of children and youth.

**VII. Internet, Social Media, and Communications Policy**

There are inherent risks involved with the use of electronic communications and digital platforms. It is the responsibility of Main Street Methodist Church-Abbeville to do no harm. The best practices listed here are intended to reduce the risk of harm to our minors and vulnerable adults.

What follows are Requirements and Guidelines of this Policy. The Requirements should always be implemented. Depending on the circumstances of the situation, some or all of the Guidelines should be implemented.

**A. Digital Communication Requirements**

- a. If communicating by email to our church wide list, place email addresses in the BCC (blind carbon copy) field or otherwise keep them private, so recipients see only their own address when a message is received.
- b. All communication will be conducted in a professional manner.
- c. Text/Email/Phone communication between a youth member and a screened volunteer working with youth must be for coordination of events and for encouragement only. Parents will have the option to opt out of their teen communicating via text/email/phone with screen volunteers on the annual Medical Release and Media form. Screened adults will use discretion in communicating with youth. When matters of emotional and physical safety are a concern, screened adults will consult with the pastor and youth leader. Together, if deemed appropriate and necessary, the parents or authorities will be contacted.

**B. Digital Platform and Social Media Requirements**

- a. Each social media account or group will have a minimum of two unrelated administrators who are either church leaders or adult screened volunteers.
- b. Social Media will be monitored frequently by these administrators to allow for quick responses in the event urgent or crisis concerns are posted.
- c. Any inappropriate material posted to church social media or groups will be deleted and addressed.
- d. Church email addresses and church digital platforms are to be used only for church-related matters and not for private communications.

**C. General Requirements:**

- a. Before a picture is utilized or posted to our newsletter or social media of a minor, we must get explicit permission from their parents in writing or



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permission on the annual Medical and Media Release. If the parent submits a picture for our “Tell Me Something Good” section of our newsletter, permission is implied since the picture was provided for that purpose.

- b. The church will provide a Medical and Media Release available on our website and urge all parents of minors to complete one annually. The Media Release should provide informed consent of all things related to digital platforms, digital communication, and social media. It should include request for permissions and/or opt-out options.
- c. Main Street Church will not post anything to our social media pages or our website if it doesn't specifically relate to the ministries of Main Street Church and/or share in our mission. If a church member suggests that we post something and it's unclear if it fits our ministries/mission, the Communications Committee will be asked to review the request via email for a decision.
- d. If a questionable communication occurs between two individuals (minor or not), the Safe Sanctuaries Coordinator, the pastor, or the SPRC chair should be notified and provided a copy of that communication. If reporting to authorities is necessary, the leader responsible will follow the steps outlined in this policy. Even if reporting is not necessary, the leader should maintain a copy of the communication and should address the concern appropriately using Biblical standards.
- e. Our church bulletin should have a standard and consistent notice to communicate that our worship service is both streamed and recorded to be made available later.

### D. Guidelines:

- a. When streaming worship services, our volunteers will remember to utilize a wide angle from the camera in the back so as not to isolate any specific child on the screen.
- b. Utilize group shots of children when possible.
- c. When sharing pictures of ministry events through the cloud, encourage individuals receiving the link not to share pictures outside of the VBS participant pool.
- d. When sharing or posting, refrain from using the last names of minors, youth, and vulnerable adults when possible.
- e. Screened Adults who have supervision and oversight of minors at church ministry events must have discretion in their personal social media and must be a positive influence on social media.
- f. No adult should ever submit a “friend request” to a minor. Adults should use discretion when accepting a “friend request” from a minor and include parents in that decision when possible.

### **VIII. Responding to Allegations of Child Abuse**

Everyone in the church has a moral responsibility and a legal duty to report suspected abuse whenever it comes to their attention, regardless of where that abuse takes place.

When abuse is suspected at a church event or on a church event away from the property OR is suspected by a volunteer who has regular supervision of a minor, youth, or vulnerable adult at church events, the following steps should be taken but not necessarily in the order listed here:

- A. Notify the Pastor who will in turn notify proper authorities (i.e., the local law enforcement agency in the jurisdiction in which the child/youth resides or in which the suspected abuse occurred and/or the appropriate department of children's services). If the allegations are against the pastor (or a member of the pastor's family) notify the chair of the SPRC.
- B. Immediately remove the accused from further involvement with children and/or youth. Once the proper authorities have been contacted and the safety of the child or youth is secured, the appointed clergy or other designated persons should inform the accused that abuse has been reported.
- C. After having reported the suspected abuse to the proper authorities, the Pastor is to report the incident immediately to the SPRC and the relevant denomination leadership, as applicable.
- D. The parents of the victim will be notified by the Pastor and/or his/her representative (unless it involves the pastor and his/her family in which the chair of the SPRC will step in) and we will take whatever steps are necessary to assure the safety and well being of the child or youth until the parent(s) arrive. NOTE: If one or both of the parents is the alleged abuser, follow the advice of the authorities concerning notification of others.
- E. We will take all allegations seriously. Remember that the care and safety of the victim is the first priority. Respond in a positive and supportive manner to the victim and the victim's family.
- F. We will show care, support, and help prevent further hurt. We will extend whatever pastoral and/or counseling resources are needed to the victim, the victim's family, and other church members affected. As appropriate, we will also extend care and connect the suspected perpetrator to necessary resources.
- G. We will keep a written report of the steps taken by the church in response to the reported abuse. The report should be brief and contain only facts relevant to the situation. It should be kept in a secure place. It should be written in ink or typed/printed to prevent it from being changed.
- H. Any contact with the media or communication with the church body should be handled in a systematic way by a pre-determined spokesperson selected by the Pastor and/or the SPRC chair.



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## **Safe Sanctuaries Policy**

### **IX. Use of Main Street Property by Outside Groups**

- A. Each formalized group or agency that works with children, youth, or vulnerable adults that rents or utilizes Main Street property is expected to provide written acknowledgement and agreement to adhere to the major tenants of this policy (background checks, appropriate supervision by screened adults, mandatory reporting, and three-person rule) but Main Street is not responsible for policing such groups or agencies. Main Street, in its discretion, may decline an application for the usage of its facilities of any organization not adhering to this policy or flagrantly disregarding this policy.
- B. If Main Street property is rented or utilized for single family use, it is the expectation that those families are responsible for their own minors and are not expected to adhere to this policy.

### **X. Implementation**

Unless otherwise specifically stated, it shall be the responsibility of the Administrative Council, with the direction of the Safe Sanctuaries Coordinator, to implement this Policy, to conduct future trainings, to manage associated paperwork, and to ensure the ongoing effectiveness of this Policy. Any questions or concerns about this policy should be directed, in writing, to the Administrative Council.

### **XI. Regular Review**

A designated task force should meet, as needed, to review necessary changes and updates. This group should consist of (but not limited to) the Safe Sanctuaries Coordinator, the Pastor, the SPRC chair, a Trustee representative, a representative from each active ministry with youth, minors, and/or vulnerable adults (if applicable), and a representative from the Safety Committee. Changes should be brought before the Administrative Council for adoption.

### **XII. Adoption**

This Safe Sanctuary Policy is adopted by action of the Administrative Council of Main Street Methodist Church- Abbeville on \_\_\_\_\_.

\_\_\_\_\_  
 Pastor

\_\_\_\_\_  
 Chair- Staff Parish Relations Committee

\_\_\_\_\_  
 Chair – Administrative Council

\_\_\_\_\_  
 Chair – Trustees





**Main Street**  
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**Safe Sanctuaries  
 Policy**

**FOR OFFICE USE ONLY**

Date Report Received: \_\_\_\_\_

Report received by: \_\_\_\_\_

Copy submitted to Parents/Guardians (if injured person is a child)

Date submitted: \_\_\_\_\_

Submitted by: \_\_\_\_\_

Copy submitted to PPRC (if related to staff/clergy)

Date submitted: \_\_\_\_\_

Information provided to insurance company (if applicable)

Date submitted: \_\_\_\_\_

Further Action:

Comments:



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### **EMERGENCY CONTACT INFORMATION**

PASTOR: Brandon Fulmer: Church, 366-2367, Cell 706-799-8095

CHAIR OF PPRC: Lori Glace 864-459-2739

CHAIRPERSON OF CHRISTIAN EDUCATION: Jenny Jackson: 804-517-1010

ABBEVILLE POLICE DEPARTMENT: 864-366-5832

ABBEVILLE COUNTY SHERIFF'S DEPARTMENT: 864-446- 6000

CHURCH INSURANCE AGENT: Southern Mutual Church, 1-800-922-5332

NATIONAL CHILD ABUSE HOT LINE: 1-800-422-4453

OUT OF HOME ABUSE AND NEGLECT UNIT (OHAN): 1-803-898-7218

COUNTY DSS OFFICE: Child Protective Services, 903 W Greenwood St., 864-366-5658