

SAFE SANCTUARY DOCUMENT AND GUIDELINES

STRONGSVILLE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

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Emergency Calls: 911

Non-emergency Numbers:

Police: 440-238-7373

Fire: 440-238-7333

Poison Control 1-800-222-1222

Cuyahoga Country Child Abuse Reporting: 216-696-5437 (KIDS)

Church Insurance Agent: Church Mutual Insurance Company

Media Spokespersons: Rev. Dave Scavuzzo or Chair of Administrative Board

District Superintendent (North Coast District): Rev. Dr. Steven Bailey Office Phone: 216-441-4527

To Report a non-emergency concern:

1. Notify a staff member as soon as possible. Call, text, or email using the staff contacts above.
2. Fill out an Incident Report (located in the Children's Office or Youth Director's Office) noting details of the incident or concern. Submit that report to a staff member or the Main Office.
3. If you feel the matter is time-sensitive and potentially a threat to the safety of a child or vulnerable person, call the Cuyahoga County Child Abuse Hotline at 216-696-5437 (KIDS).

STRONGSVILLE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH
SAFE SANCTUARY GUIDELINES

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STRONGSVILLE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH
SAFE SANCTUARY GUIDELINES

Strongsville UMC believes in the value of children, youth, and vulnerable people and that we're called to care for them in all our ministries. Jesus said, *"Whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me. If any of you put a stumbling block before one of these little ones who believe in me, it would be better for you if a great millstone were fastened around your neck and you were drowned in the depth of the sea."* (Matthew 18:5-6)

I. INTRODUCTION AND PURPOSE

A central tenet of the Christian faith is the inherent value and worth of all children, youth and vulnerable adults. The Strongsville United Methodist Church has a responsibility to provide such guidelines and guidelines that respect and protect the inherent value and worth of all persons who participate in worship, Christian education, and Church-related activities. Children and vulnerable adults are least able to protect themselves in our society and are particularly vulnerable to abuse and neglect.

In April 1996, the General Conference of the United Methodist Church adopted a resolution aimed at reducing the risk of sexual abuse in the Church. The following is an excerpt from that resolution:

Our Christian faith calls us to offer both hospitality and protection to the little ones, the Children. The Social Principles of the United Methodist Church state that ". . . children, youth, and vulnerable persons must be protected from economic, physical and sexual exploitation and abuse." Tragically, Churches have not always been safe places for children. Child, youth, and vulnerable person sexual abuse, exploitation and ritual abuse . . . occur in Churches, both large and small, urban and rural. The problem cuts across all economic, cultural and racial lines . . . God calls us to make our Churches safe places, protecting children and other vulnerable persons from sexual and ritual abuse.

"People were bringing little children to him in order that he might touch them; and the disciples spoke sternly to them. But when Jesus saw this, he was indignant and said to them "Let the little children come to me; do not stop them; for it is to such as these that The kingdom of God belongs. Truly, I tell you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will never enter it. And he took them up in his arms, laid his hands on them, and blessed them." (Mark 10:13-16)

Jesus highlighted not only the faith and openness of children, but also their vulnerability. This vulnerability puts children, youth, and other vulnerable persons at risk, but it also places them close to God. Their dependence on God may be what Jesus was trying to get his disciples to see as a model for their own faith. This vulnerability and dependence makes the protection and support of the community of faith even more important. Jesus was teaching that, within the community of believers, there must be protection for each of us in our dependence on God and on each other. As followers of Christ, we resolve to protect children, youth, and vulnerable persons in their vulnerability and also to learn from them as we all grow in the faith.

The purpose of the Safe Sanctuaries Guideline of the Strongsville United Methodist Church is:

1. To provide guidelines specifically designed to protect children, youth, vulnerable adults, church staff members, and volunteers associated with the activities of the church.

2. To establish appropriate ways of responding to alleged, reported, or suspected incidents of abuse.
3. To be in a compassionate ministry with the affected persons, the alleged victim, the alleged victim's family, the accused, the accused's family, and the church family.

In covenant with all United Methodist congregations, we adopt this Guideline for the prevention of abuse in our Church, vowing to safeguard the children/youth and vulnerable adults of our Church from abuse and neglect:

1. Fairly, compassionately, and confidentially respond to alleged, reported, and suspected incidents of abuse.
2. Protect adults (paid and volunteer) from potential false allegations of abuse.
3. Limit the extent of the Church's legal risk and liability exposure.
4. Respond to all allegations in a fair and compassionate manner.
5. Strengthen our faith formation ministries.

II. DEFINITIONS

Abuse - The infliction of physical pain or injury or the willful deprivation of services necessary to maintain mental and physical health, by a caregiver or other person.

Abuse consists of any of the following:

1. Engaging in any sexual activity with a child, youth, or vulnerable person (physical or visual), as defined under Chapter 2907 of the Ohio Revised Code; or
2. Endangering a child, youth, or vulnerable person as defined in Section 2919.22 of the Ohio Revised Code**;
or
3. Denying, as a means of punishment, proper or necessary subsistence, education, medical care, or other care necessary for a child, youth, or vulnerable person's health; or
4. Using restraint guidelines on a child, youth, or vulnerable person that may cause injury or pain; or
5. Administering prescription drugs to a child, youth, or vulnerable person without the written approval and ongoing supervision of a licensed physician; or
6. Providing alcoholic beverages or controlled substances to a child, youth, or vulnerable person; or
7. Commissioning any intentional act that results in any injury or death to a child, youth, or vulnerable person;
or
8. Inflicting physical or mental injury that threatens to harm a child, youth, or vulnerable person's health, welfare, or safety.

**In its present form, this law defines "child endangerment" to include any of the following: (1) abuse; or (2) torture or cruel abuse; or (3) corporal punishment or other physical discipline (e.g., such as spankings) or prolonged cruel restraint, which is excessive under the circumstances, and which could likely physically injure the child; or (4) repeated, uncalled-for discipline which, if continued, would seriously impair the child's mental health or development; or (5) involving the child in any obscene, sexually-oriented, or nudity-oriented activity or conduct. *(This also applies to vulnerable adults).*

Adult - A person at least 18 years of age and graduated high school and at least 5 years older than those being supervised.

Caregiver - An individual who has responsibility for the care of a vulnerable person as a result of a family relationship, or who has assumed that responsibility voluntarily, by contract, or as a result of the ties of friendship.

Child or Minor - A person under 18 years of age

Emotional Abuse – The intentional or reckless infliction of emotional or mental anguish, or the use of a physical or chemical restraint, medication or isolation as punishment or as a substitute for treatment or care of any vulnerable person.

Exploitation – The expenditure, diminution, or use of the property, assets or resources of a vulnerable person without the express voluntary consent of that person or his or her legally-authorized representative.

Financial Exploitation – The use of deception, intimidation, undue influence, force or threat of force to obtain or exert unauthorized control over a vulnerable person’s property, with the intent to deprive the vulnerable person of that property.

Intern – Paid or unpaid person including but not limited to choral scholars, choral conductors, Artist in Residence

Neglect – The failure of a caregiver or other person to provide reasonably adequate food, shelter, clothing, medical services, medication or health care for a vulnerable person.

Ritual Abuse – regular intentional physical, sexual, or psychological violations of a vulnerable person to appeal to a higher authority of power

Staff Person – Any person employed by the church.

Volunteer – A Safe Sanctuary trained person who assists in conducting activities for vulnerable persons.

Vulnerable Person– Any child or youth, as well as any adult whose behavior indicates that he or she is mentally or emotionally incapable of adequately caring for himself or herself and his or her interests without adverse consequences to himself or herself or others, or who, because of physical or mental impairment, is unable to protect himself or herself from abuse, neglect, exploitation, sexual abuse, or emotional abuse by others.

Safe Sanctuary - Guidelines developed to protect our vulnerable persons in order to make our congregation a safe place where everyone may experience the abiding love of God and fellowship within the community of faith. This includes children’s check in/out guidelines, training and background checks for those working with vulnerable persons, and guidelines that guide the interaction of children, youth and adults.

III. Selection and Screening of Church Staff and Volunteers

Although our concern for children, youth and vulnerable adults leads us to be saddened when any form of child abuse takes place anywhere, our major guideline need is to be certain that abuse does not occur within the framework of any Strongsville United Methodist Church program or ministry. This outline is intended to help our congregation make Strongsville United Methodist Church a truly safe and caring place.

In an effort to create a safe environment within our church, all church staff members, volunteers, and paid and unpaid interns who work either regularly or occasionally, on or beyond the church ground, will be screened and will be trained on Safe Sanctuary practices and guidelines and abuse issues.

The guideline for selecting and screening is as follows: The Staff Parish Relations Committee may set additional screening and performance standards for paid staff.

1. Each person being considered to work with any church program, whether as a volunteer or paid staff person, shall complete the application form and submit to a background check (or any background check service Strongsville UMC may purchase). They must also supply Strongsville UMC with names and contact information for 3 references on the Reference form.
2. In accordance with church guidelines, applicants for any paid positions must have a BCI and FBI fingerprint check as well as DMV check.
3. Before placing the applicant in a position of responsibility, the pastor, church staff member, or lay person responsible for the ministry will review the submitted application and results from the background check to determine if the applicant will be interviewed. Indications that an interview must take place include:
 - a. The person is a newcomer to Strongsville United Methodist Church and/or to Strongsville, Ohio.
 - b. The person wants to work alone.
 - c. The person or background check has indicated that he/she has been charged with a crime against children, youth, or vulnerable persons. (Persons who have been previously convicted or have pleaded guilty or no contest to a crime against children, youth, or vulnerable persons will not be placed in a position involving access to children, youth, or vulnerable persons.)
 - d. The Department of Motor Vehicle report indicates that the person has a number of concerning driving violations based on the discretion of the Safe Sanctuary team and/or lead pastor.
 - e. Upon checking references, issues are raised which require clarification.

Interviews will follow the interview guidelines provided in the appendix of this guideline and be conducted by the pastor, church staff member, the layperson responsible for the ministry, or through the use of a designated person(s).

The results of the interview, especially when sensitive areas have been discussed, should be kept confidential and only disclosed to those persons requiring this information in order to make a decision as to whether the applicant should be accepted as a volunteer.

4. Whether or not an interview is conducted, the pastor, church staff member, or lay person responsible for the ministry will contact the three references provided on the application form. A written record of such contact will be retained with the application form (see appendix of this guideline).
5. Before beginning work with either children, youth, or vulnerable adults, each volunteer, staff, or intern will:
 - Sign a statement that he/she has read, has understood, and has agreed to abide by the church's Safe Sanctuaries Guideline. (Such statement is a part of the application form.)

- Complete other training as detailed in section XI: Education of Persons Who Work with Vulnerable Persons.

In the unfortunate situation where it has been determined that an applicant should not work with children/youth/vulnerable persons, the church needs to handle such a decision in a confidential manner which is sensitive to that person.

IV. Supervision of Children, Youth, and Vulnerable Adults

Emergency Medical/Permission Forms

Emergency Medical/Permission Forms need to be completed and updated by the parent and/or guardian each year for all children, youth and adults involved in the programs of the church. This form includes medical treatment information, permission for all activities that do not involve travel or overnight stays, as well as parental/guardian permission for SUMC to post photos on websites, publications, and bulletin boards. A master copy and a portable copy of the forms will be kept in the education office. It is the activity facilitator's responsibility to carry the portable copy of the forms during his/her events. A separate event-specific permission form is required for all events that involve travel or overnight stays. It is recommended that all separate permission forms must be distributed at least 2 weeks before they are due.

Supervision of Classroom Activities

A concerted effort will be made to provide at least two adults, non-related, non-cohabiting, for all classroom activities involving vulnerable persons. When two adults are not available, a designated person will periodically check the rooms and be aware of the children/youth's whereabouts if they leave the classroom area. While recognizing the important role of youth volunteers in children/youth ministries and in an effort to ensure a safe environment, all activities involving children and youth will be supervised by at least one adult who is eighteen years of age or older, high school graduate or equivalent. Persons supervising activities must be at least 5 years older than the children or youth they are supervising.

Special Rules for Supervision of Specific Activities

Child/Youth Advising – In instances of child/youth conversations where circumstances dictate that conversation will be most effective on a one-on-one basis, church staff may meet individually with a child/youth with the awareness and previous consent of that individual's parent or legal guardian. Exceptions to consent may be made for emergencies. Conversation should take place in an open and/or visible setting. Volunteers should share conversations with the pastors or staff who supervise the ministry they are involved in and encourage student to speak with staff or pastor.

Confirmation Mentoring Program: In instances of confirmation and youth mentoring where circumstances dictate that mentoring is most effective on a one-on-one basis, a confirmation mentor may meet individually with a child or youth in the home of the confirmand when that individual's parent or legal guardian is present in the home. One on one mentoring is permissible when in a public place and the parent or guardian is knowledgeable or in proximity. Mentoring may also take place in the church if in a relatively open area and the parent or a designated adult is present in the church and are aware of the meeting.

Dismissal from Group Events: In group events, it may be inevitable that one child's or youth's transportation from the event arrives after all other children/youths' transportation has arrived. In those circumstances, a child/youth may unavoidably be in the individual presence of an adult. In the event this circumstance is unavoidable, the adult in charge should exercise best practices for the well-being of vulnerable persons. We strongly suggest calling another Safe Sanctuary trained person to listen in or record the conversation as a third party.

Youth are not allowed to leave the church property unsupervised during an event without parental permission.

Off-Site, Trip and Retreat Supervision

- There shall be at least two adults present for all trips, retreats, and other times that children/youth gather at or away from the church building.
- There shall be at least one adult of each gender present at co-ed overnight events. At single gender overnight events, at least one of the two or more adults present will be of the same gender as the children/youth.
- In situations where two adults are not available per room where children/youth are staying overnight, then no adult should stay alone in a specific room with the children/youth. Parents should be made aware of housing accommodations.
- Permission slips including permission for emergency medical care shall be carried by the person in charge of each trip and/or retreat.
 - a. Parent must receive contact info to include:
 - i. start/stop times
 - ii. location of event
 - iii. program content
 - iv. lodging information
 - v. covenant rules expected of their child
 - b. Staff/volunteer/drivers must receive:
 - i. all contact information for parents
 - ii. signed parent/guardian permission/liability form
 - iii. health/emergency information

Designated Transportation Provider

- Drivers must be known to the designated leader of the event.
- Drivers must have a current "Designated Transportation Provider Form" on file as well as a valid state driver's license, proof of insurance, and be at least 21 years old.
- Drivers must obey all traffic laws and speed limits.
- All passengers including adults must use an individual seat belt while traveling.
- Drivers must transport more than one student at a time
- Students are not permitted to drive as part of youth events, transporting other youth.
- Driver must not deviate from agreed upon route.

Open Door Guideline

Parents/guardians, volunteers, or staff of the church may visit and observe the program at any time.

Sign-In/Sign-Out Guideline

Persons responsible for children, infants through fifth grade, will register their children and indicate the pre-authorized person(s) to whom their children may be signed out for both Sunday School and other children's activities.

Abduction by A Non-Custodial Person

If a parent or guardian has made the SUMC aware of a possible threat of abduction by a non-custodial parent or other relative that the courts have deemed unfit to have access to a particular child or children/ youth or vulnerable adult the SUMC will request and keep on file a letter and/or some other official document that indicates who is not to have access to that/those child/children or vulnerable adult. It is incumbent on the parent or guardian to notify the adult leader of the activity when the child or children/ youth or vulnerable adult are left in their care. Appropriate church staff will be made aware of the situation, and the authorities will be notified if an attempt or abduction occurs.

Record Retention

All activities involving vulnerable persons should have a written record of the names of participants and supervisors. Records should be kept for at least three years. Church activities/meetings, whether onsite or off-site and any non-church building use involving vulnerable persons, should be on the church calendar. Examples include rehearsals, mentoring, meetings and small groups. Stephen Ministry will maintain records according to Stephen Ministry guidelines. (Any church sponsored group that meets with children, youth, or vulnerable adults will keep record of visits).

Restroom and Diaper Change Guidelines

- Diaper changes in open view
- If assistance is needed (especially with young children) ask another volunteer to be present with you if possible.

Appropriate Forms of Touch

- *Touching between an adult and a youth, child, or vulnerable adult should only occur in the presence of other adults.*
- Practice appropriate forms of touch. Safe places to touch a vulnerable person are hand, shoulder and upper back. *A side-on hug of the shoulders is preferred. Never against a person's verbally or non-verbally expressed discomfort, such as crossed arms or stepping back.*
- A person's preference not to be touched should be respected by all persons and includes adult to vulnerable person, youth to youth and child to child.
- *The adult should respond to the child's need for comfort and encouragement and not base touching on their own emotional needs.*

V. Social Media and Technology

Given the increased use of technology and social media in the life of the church and its individual members, faith communities have a responsibility to define social media guidelines that uphold the covenant to create Safe Sanctuaries for vulnerable persons. To this end, following are guidelines for the use of social media, technology and the internet:

- We will protect the privacy and identity of all vulnerable persons in online writings, postings and discussions.
- Volunteers and staff must not post photos or video that identifies vulnerable persons by name, address, or other specific identification on any online site or printed publication without written consent from a parent or legal guardian.
 - Furthermore, volunteers and staff may not post photos or videos of vulnerable persons on their own personal social media accounts including, but not limited to: Facebook, Snapchat, Twitter, Instagram, etc.
- All social media groups (Facebook, Snapchat, etc.) associated with preschool, children's or youth ministry areas should be designated as "closed" groups, requiring all those who wish to gain access to be approved by the group's administrator(s).

- All church-related social media groups (Facebook, Snapchat, etc.) and pages must have at least two administrators. If an administrator is no longer associated with the ministry, that individual's administrative status must be revoked.
- Photos of vulnerable persons may only be published or posted on social media (Facebook, Snapchat, etc.) after a photo release has been signed by their parent/guardian. It is suggested that all permission slips contain a statement that approval to participate in the event includes approval for photographs to be used in church-related media. Photos used in other mediums, such as church newsletters, websites, blogs, twitter pics, etc., must not include any identifying information of minors without permission.
- Photos may only be posted to the social media (Facebook, Snapchat, etc.) page by page administrators. Adults (staff, volunteers, parents, etc.) should not identify minors in photographs posted online or in print. Individuals (including minors) are welcome to identify (i.e. "tag") themselves.
- When checking in on Foursquare, Facebook, or any location tagging social media, only "check in" yourself. Never check in minors. Be sensitive to tagging or revealing other participants' location without their expressed permission. Rather, create a hashtag to facilitate conversation.
- In the case of clergy/professional staff and church member online connections, friend requests, follow requests, circle requests, etc. should be initiated by the church member, especially if the church member is a vulnerable person.
- We will maintain appropriate relational boundaries with minors.
- No adult shall initiate social media (Facebook, Snapchat, etc.) contact with or "friend" a vulnerable person. When accepting the "friend" requests of a vulnerable person, care should be taken to respect the ministry and discipleship work of the local faith community to which they belong. Any conversations on Social Media with vulnerable persons shall occur in open channels, or with multiple parties present in the conversation thread.
- When emailing, texting, tweeting, posting or messaging a vulnerable person, adults should copy another adult (ideally a parent or guardian) on the message, or post it in a public venue (i.e. a Facebook wall as opposed to a private message). This will allow adults to maintain the "two adults present" Safe Sanctuaries standard when using social media. Platforms promising discrete conversations and secrecy (Snapchat, etc.) should be avoided.

CYBERBULLYING:

- We shall not engage in, encourage or condone cyber-bullying. Every children's ministry and youth ministry group, and adult volunteer training session will include types and consequences of cyber-bullying, including how to identify it and how to report it.
- Cyberbullying is "Online Bullying" that happens when child/youth use the internet, cell phones or other devices to send or post text or images intended to hurt or embarrass another person. Any digital device can be used and probably has.

- Types of Cyberbullying:

Denigration: Putting mean messages online intended to make fun of someone.

Exclusion: Intentionally leaving someone out of a group, online group or activity.

Outing: Sharing secrets about someone online including private information, pictures and videos.

Trickery: tricking someone into revealing personal information, then share it with others.

Impersonation: Pretending to be someone else when sending or posting mean or false messages.

Harassment: Repeatedly sending malicious messages to someone online.

Cyberstalking: continuously harassing and denigration including threats of physical contact or harm.

Catfishing: lure (someone) into a relationship by means of a fictional online persona.

- Reporting Cyberbullying

Immediately: don't respond or forward messages; keep evidence; block the person

Report: to online service providers.

Law Enforcement: if it threatens violence; pornography; stalking and hate crimes.

Schools: if child/youth is involved.

Church: if it resulted from a church sponsored event or group notify the church immediately so the Safe Sanctuary protocol can be followed.

In general, Strongsville UMC views social networking sites (e.g. Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram), personal websites, web Blogs and twitter accounts positively and respects the right of paid/volunteer staff to use them as a medium of self-expression. If a person chooses to identify himself or herself as a paid/volunteer staff at a church sponsored event on such Internet venues, some readers of such websites, blogs or tweets may view the paid/volunteer staff as a representative or spokesperson of the church. In light of this possibility, Strongsville UMC requires, as a condition of participation in the event, that paid/volunteer staff observe the following guidelines when referring to Strongsville United Methodist Church, its programs or activities, its participants, and /or paid/volunteer staffs in a blog, on a social networking site, on a website or in a tweet:

1. Paid/volunteer staff must be respectful in all communications related to or referencing Strongsville UMC, its programs or activities, its participants, and /or paid/volunteer staffs.
2. Paid/volunteer staff must not use obscenities, profanity, or vulgar language.
3. Paid/volunteer staff must not use blogs, personal websites, networking sites or tweets to disparage Strongsville UMC, its programs or activities, its participants, and/or paid/volunteer staff.
4. Paid/volunteer staff must not use blogs, personal websites, networking sites or tweets to harass, bully, or intimidate participants, or paid/volunteer staff of events sponsored by Strongsville UMC. Behaviors that constitute harassment and bullying include, but are not limited to, comments that are derogatory with respect to race, religion, gender, sexual orientation, color, disability, sexually suggestive, humiliating, or demeaning comments, and threats to stalk, haze, or physically injure another person.
5. Paid/volunteer staff must not use blogs, personal websites, networking sites or tweets to discuss engaging in conduct that is prohibited by Strongsville UMC Guidelines, including, but not limited to, the use of alcohol and illegal drugs, sexual behavior, sexual harassment, and bullying.
6. Paid/volunteer staff should not post pictures on personal social media account, but may share SUMC posts to their personal account.

Any participant found to be in violation of any portion of this guideline may be unable to register for future Strongsville UMC sponsored events. Any paid/volunteer staff found to be in violation of any portion of this guideline may be subject to appropriate disciplinary action, up to and including dismissal.

VI. Safe Sanctuary Hosts

In the event one time professionals will be providing leadership in events with vulnerable persons the following guidelines should be incorporated:

- Guest Leaders are defined as persons who are not affiliated with Strongsville UMC, not attending worship, groups, or other activities. Leaders affiliated with Strongsville UMC will follow Safe Sanctuary guidelines for background checks and training as described in the guideline.
- In the event Guest leaders will be needed on a one time basis, ministry leaders will provide trained and background checked Safe Sanctuary hosts to be present with the guest leader.

VII. Ministry Coordinators

Persons who desire to coordinate ministries involving children, youth, and vulnerable adults should follow the steps listed below prior to beginning a ministry involving children, youth, and vulnerable adults.

1. Participate in Safe Sanctuary volunteer training.
2. Contact the Ministry Team Leader and/or staff liaison best connected to the ministry you desire to coordinate to share and discuss your ideas.
3. Participate in annual training for ministry coordinators which includes but is not limited to the following: registration and attendance guidelines, annual volunteer training, scheduling, communication and financial guideline.

VIII. Response to Injuries and Accidents

In order to ensure proper attention was given to an injury or accident, an Accident/Injury report must be completed by the adult supervisor within 24 hours of the incident whenever a vulnerable person is injured. Parents and/or guardians will receive a copy of the Accident/Injury report. (See attached form)

IX. Response to Incidents of Indiscretion

Guideline for dealing with other serious allegations of safe sanctuary violations:

- Behaviors that hinder our mission of creating a safe and welcoming environment undermine leadership/program, and neglect safety should be taken seriously even when such behavior may not be 'illegal.' Reports should be directed to the pastor, staff relating to that program area and/or the event coordinator.
- A resolution should be sought via direct or mediated conversation when possible, barring a situation with an egregious violation.
- If a resolution between parties is not possible, the pastor, staff relating to the program area and Safe Sanctuary ministry group shall have the authority to proscribe a resolution. This may include a review of an individual's future involvement in ministries with vulnerable populations.
- Documentation of all efforts to communicate and resolve the situation. (See attached form)

In the case of an allegation that involves abuse, neglect or other illegal behavior, guidelines for responding to allegations of abuse listed in "Section X - Response to Allegations of Abuse" should be followed.

In addition to the behaviors that are described in section X, there are other behaviors that may be incidents of indiscretion or violations of Safe Sanctuary practices that hinder our mission of creating a safe, welcoming and hospitable environment. Examples of these incidents include a chaperone who continually undermines program objectives or an event planner who neglects training or health and safety concerns, complaints about behavior of volunteers and staff that is not compliant with Safe Sanctuary practices, etc.

When serious concerns arise:

1. The ministry coordinator should invite the person raising the concern to talk directly with the person whose behavior is in question. The ministry coordinator should notify their staff liaison and/or pastoral ministry supervisor of the concern.
2. If the person raising the concern is unwilling or unable to talk directly with that person, the incident involves a minor or vulnerable person, or if the initial conversation is unproductive, then the ministry coordinator and/or staff liaison for that ministry area and pastor shall meet with the persons involved in the situation to seek resolution. Pastoral care should be extended for any victims involved in the incident.
3. Anonymous complaints or evaluations shall be considered unverifiable, and therefore, will have no foundation for being officially addressed.
4. Persons whose behavior hinders the goals of the ministry may face review of their participation in leadership for that behavior.
5. If the person who is observed in indiscretions of the Safe Sanctuary guideline is the pastor then the person who is raising the concern may report to the Safe Sanctuary Ministry Group and Staff Parish Relations Committee.
6. The pastor and/or staff person relating to the program area, and/or Safe Sanctuary representative is responsible for carefully documenting all aspects of the incident using the Incident Report Form.
7. The pastor and staff person relating to the program area, and/or Safe Sanctuary representative are responsible for contacting the accused and informing the accused of the nature of the process. The purpose of this meeting is not to interrogate the accused but to discuss the accusation. Any meetings with the accused should include at least two other persons (e.g. pastor, staff, safe sanctuary group member, etc.).
8. If the incident is put under investigation by appropriate civil authorities, the investigation will be monitored by the Safe Sanctuary ministry group, pastor and staff relating to the program until there is an outcome.

9. If there is no civil investigation or once the investigation by civil authorities is completed, the Safe Sanctuary ministry group, pastor and staff relating to the program shall jointly consider the incident to determine whether any further actions are needed.
10. After conducting an investigation involving all parties, the pastor and staff person relating to the program area shall report the findings to the accused and the Safe Sanctuary ministry group. If it is determined that the person has committed an act of abuse, engaged in an illegal activity or a behavior which compromises Safe Sanctuary practices, the final goal of this process is to establish a future covenant with the offender that regulates their behavior at all levels of involvement in the ministries of the church. This covenant shall include both record of what offending actions were committed and solutions about what should be done in the future.
11. If no covenant is established, the accused shall remain suspended from working with youth/children/vulnerable persons until mediation is complete.

All documentation relating to the incident will be confidentially filed in secured Safe Sanctuary files maintained by the Director of Safe Sanctuary. Forms should be filed in an incident folder and with an individual's Safe Sanctuary forms.

X. Response to Allegations of Abuse

As caring Christians, we are committed to protect and to be advocates for vulnerable persons participating in the life of the church. The Church is entrusted to provide an emotionally safe, spiritually grounded, healthful environment for children, youth, and adults in which they are protected from abuse. It is our legal and moral responsibility to report suspected abuse whenever it comes to our attention regardless of where that abuse takes place. We shall report abuse to stop potentially existing abuse and to prevent further abuse. To report abuse is to be a witness to the world of the love and justice of God. Reporting abuse is a form of ministering to the needs of those crying out for help. If abuse occurs, it is our intention to act as an advocate for all affected persons, providing support, information, assistance and intervention. We seek to provide a supportive atmosphere, offering both objectivity and empathy, as we seek to create a climate in which healing can take place.

If abuse is suspected by, observed by or disclosed to a volunteer and/or paid staff member of the church, that person must follow reporting requirements and report the incident immediately to the pastor. If that person is uncomfortable reporting the incident to the pastor, then the alleged abuse should be reported to the staff person who supervises that ministry area.

1. The suspected abuse shall be immediately reported to Children Services or the local law enforcement agency. This is a requirement of the law. (Reference section 2151.421 of The Ohio Revised Code.) Do not attempt an investigation. This should be left to professionals who are familiar with these cases.

COMPLIANCE WITH THE PROVISIONS OF THIS GUIDELINE IN NO WAY ELIMINATES THE REQUIREMENT THAT CERTAIN EMPLOYEES COMPLY WITH THE MANDATORY REPORTING REQUIREMENTS OF OHIO REVISED CODE SECTION 2151.421.

Ohio Revised Code Section 2151.421 requires mandatory reporting of suspected abuse and neglect. It requires employees of day care centers and child care agencies, and "any persons rendering spiritual treatment through prayer in accordance with the tenets of a well-recognized religion" to make reports to child protective services. These reports must be made if the individual knows or suspects that a child faces threat of suffering any physical or mental wound, injury, disability, or condition of a nature that reasonably indicates abuse neglect of the child. In Stark County that report is made by calling 330.455.KIDS. Your name will be kept strictly confidential.

IT IS NOT SUFFICIENT FOR THE EMPLOYEE TO MERELY REPORT TO HIS OR HER SUPERVISOR. HE OR SHE MUST REPORT DIRECTLY TO CHILD PROTECTIVE SERVICES AS WELL.

2. A written report of the basic information shall be kept to ensure on-going ministry to, and advocacy for, victims and others involved. A form for this purpose shall be available in the education office. This form is to be completed by the person who observed the suspected abuse or to whom the suspected abuse was disclosed.

The report shall be brief and contain only factual information relevant to the situation. It shall be filed in a secure place in order to ensure confidentiality. It shall be written in ink or typed to prevent it from being changed. The church must also file a copy of the report with the bishop's office of the East Ohio Conference, where it will be placed in a secure file.

3. After having reported the suspected abuse to Children Services or the local law enforcement agency, the incident is to be reported immediately to the church insurance company and district superintendent by the pastor(s) or administrative staff of the church. The district superintendent will report the allegation to the bishop's office. Do not try to handle this without professional outside assistance.
4. The pastor(s) will notify the parents. Do not prejudge the situation, but take the allegations seriously and reach out to the victim and the victim's family. Showing care and support help to prevent further hurt. Extend whatever pastoral resources are needed. Remember that the care and safety of the victim is the first priority. Responding in a negative or non-supportive manner to the alleged victim may increase the anger and pain of the victim and the victim's family. Future reconciliation will be more difficult and the possibility of conflict increases. Note: if one or both of the parents or legal guardian is the alleged abuser, contact the proper authorities. Follow their advice about notification of the parents.
5. Once Children Services or the local law enforcement agency has been contacted and the safety of the child or youth member is secured, the pastor(s) will tell the accused that a report has been made. The accused will be treated with dignity and support. If the accused is a volunteer or paid staff of the church, that person shall be relieved temporarily of his or her duties until the investigation is finished. If the accused is a paid staff of the church, arrangements should be made to either maintain or suspend his or her income until the allegations are cleared or substantiated based on recommendations of SPRC and/or the East Ohio Conference Bishop's office.
6. The pastor, district superintendent, or bishop's offices should inform the alleged victim, the alleged victim's family, the accused, and the accused's family of the existence of the process of the East Ohio Conference Communications Department. This committee's mission is to support, guide, and offer options to the alleged victim, the alleged victim's family, the accused, the accused's family, the pastor, and the district superintendent. This committee is appointed by the bishop and may include, but not be limited to, a licensed counselor/social worker with child abuse treatment experience, a licensed psychologist or psychiatrist with child abuse treatment experience, an attorney, a lay person who is a parent and a clergy person.

Any contact with the media shall be handled by the pastor, district superintendent, bishop, or their designated representative. Care will be taken to safeguard the privacy and confidentiality of all involved. The spokesperson should generally convey that the matter is under investigation and any comments made prior to the conclusion of the investigation would be premature.

XI. Education of Persons Who Work With Vulnerable Persons

At least once a year regularly scheduled training focused on Safe Sanctuary best practices for those working with vulnerable persons will be required. Training must be conducted by persons approved to lead Safe Sanctuary orientations by the Safe Sanctuary ministry group and incorporate consistent use of handouts in all trainings. Attendance at this training or a district/conference sponsored training session shall be required of all persons

who will have direct contact with vulnerable persons in the church's ministry. The church will assume the cost of training.

The training should include, but is not limited to:

1. Definition and recognition of abuse and the church's guidelines on reporting abuse.
2. The purposes of the guideline as protection for children, youth, and vulnerable persons and for church staff/volunteer workers as well as the ministries of the church.
3. The meaning and importance of confidentiality by staff, volunteer workers, paid and unpaid interns.
4. The role of one who hears a disclosure
5. Use of report forms including registration, attendance, accident/injury incident, emergency medical and photo release forms.
6. Maintaining a positive learning classroom environment, including appropriate discipline
7. Appropriate behavior for teachers and leaders
8. Common age-level characteristics

Forms and Reports

Forms for reports and registration are included in the next section of the Safe Sanctuary guideline.

Ministry Coordinators and staff can use the templates provided in the guideline to create forms personalized for each activity. The templates include the basic questions, waivers and releases which are required to be included. Additional questions that may be helpful for the event can be added. All forms need to be approved by the Safe Sanctuary group prior to distribution.

XII. Sex Offender Attendance Guideline

Often times the desire to ignore, avoid, and hope for speedy forgiveness is the course of choice when faced with the knowledge of a sex offender in our church congregation. It is important that we focus on behavior of the offender. In doing so, we are in a much better position to hold the person to accountability. This is crucial if we are to provide as much protection as possible for our congregations. We simply cannot be bystanders when we know a person is a convicted sex offender. Developing policy and guidelines for the offender's participation in the church is an important first step. I recommend these be shared with the entire congregation and staff. This can send a clear message to the offender which states we care enough about you to hold you accountable for what you have done.

The hope of these guidelines are to enhance the safety and healing for all concerned. Offender, survivors, victims and congregation can be mutually protected from harm by compliance with the following guidelines and then accountability to an established policy.

A carefully constructed and openly negotiated covenant signed between the offender and the church community should include agreements in the following areas:

1. Full compliance with all information regarding restrictions and requirements placed upon the offender as a result of any legal actions. We request a copy of any judgments, conditions of parole, or other documents in which restrictions on or requirements as a result of convictions or judgments are stated. There must never be a situation where the church is helping a person to break terms of their parole.
2. If a survivor is present in the community, the survivor initiates any contact or meeting vs. clergy or offender to reach into their healing space.
3. It would be inappropriate to ever invite or even allow an offender to reenter the safe sanctuary space of a healing survivor of a crime without prior arrangements and considerations for the survivor.
4. Continuous participation in a professional counseling program for the entire time you desire access to this Christian fellowship.

5. Entrance into and exit out of church buildings may only be through the most direct route from parking lot to the main entrance of sanctuary or church school class/group meeting.
6. There can be no role that includes convicted sex offenders which includes contact with children or youth at any time and avoid the church library, nursery, preschool, elementary, junior high or high school areas of the facilities.
7. A convicted sex offender must have at least 2 adult “covenant partners” to accompany you while on church property or access to bathrooms.
8. It will be important to understand should if an offender decides to relocate and attend another church, we will, in response to our acknowledged Christian, ethical and moral duty, seek to inform the leadership of any such congregation of the factual conditions of these guidelines.

XII. Special Issues or Exceptions

Not every circumstance can be identified or covered in this guideline. Additionally, there are times that enough adults that qualify under this guideline are available or willing to meet the requirements as established by the guideline. Every effort will be made to meet the spirit and intent of the guideline to protect the children from the potential of abuse, as well as protecting the members and the church from false accusations.

For those times that there must be a deviation of the guideline, the sponsor of the event or teacher must submit to the Committee on Education a request for exception or waiver to the guideline. The request must be specific as to why the request is made, how long it will be in effect and what additional precautions (if any) will be in effect. The effort must continue to meet the guideline requirements.

STRONGSVILLE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

Best Practices and Quick Reference Guide

Jesus highlighted not only the faith and openness of children, but also their vulnerability. This vulnerability puts children at risk, but it also places them close to God. Their dependence on God may be what Jesus was trying to get his disciples to see as a model for their own faith. This vulnerability and dependence makes the protection and support of the community of faith even more important. Jesus was teaching that, within the community of believers, there must be protection for each of us in our dependence on God and on each other. As followers of Christ, we resolve to protect children in their vulnerability and also to learn from them as we all grow in the faith.

The purpose of the Safe Sanctuaries Guideline of the Strongsville United Methodist Church is:

1. To provide guidelines specifically designed to protect children, youth, vulnerable adults, church staff members, and volunteers associated with the activities of the church.
2. To establish appropriate ways of responding to alleged, reported, or suspected incidents of abuse.
3. To be in a compassionate ministry with the affected persons, the alleged victim, the alleged victim's family, the accused, the accused's family, and the church family.

Best Practices...

- Be present 15-30 minutes before activity begins to prepare and welcome guests. Have children sign in either on the attendance sheet or at designated area for the ministry you are serving in.
- Make every effort to have 2 non-related/non-cohabitating adults present for all activities. Avoid being alone with a student. Contact program leaders if assistance is needed. Roamers may be used for situations when 2 non-related/non-cohabitating adults aren't present.
- Ministry Coordinators should record attendance/activity including adults, children and youth present.
- Permission and emergency medical forms are required for all activities for children/youth participation.
- **Restroom Guidelines/Drinking Fountain:** Kids use the restrooms/drinking fountain in the main hallways. Escort children in pairs or small groups; wait outside the door.
 - If any assistance is needed (especially with young children), ask another volunteer to be present with you.

Check-In Guidelines: Parents/Guardians will register/sign in children in the Education Area downstairs. Building relationships is an important part of this ministry!

- Ask if there are special needs, contact info and who will be picking child up and write on sign-in paper.

Dismissal Guidelines: Parents/Guardians will come to your group to pick up their children. Please remain with children until all children have been dismissed.

- Ask for the parent/caregiver name, child's name and number, check the name and number on the name tag (preschool → 5th grade).
- It is also okay to ask for a photo ID and check to see that matches the name you were given when the child came in the morning.
- Be sure to send home anything the kids received that day, especially info for families!
- If you have children in your group that belong to other volunteers, please keep them with you until all other children have been picked up and then walk them to their parent, grandparent, or caregiver.

Be aware of any allergies or special circumstances for any students in your group. Specific information will be listed on the student roster in group folder or written by parents on the sign-in sheets.

- Parents/Guardians are entrusting their children to us. It's important to be good stewards of that trust and respect and protect confidential information. We are required by the state of Ohio to report suspicions of abuse and neglect. Refer to the Safe Sanctuary Guideline for definitions of abuse and neglect. Please contact Pastor Dave, Pastor Hannah, Pastor Matt, Leanne Gruss or Carol Williams regarding any situations.
- Be mindful of the age level characteristics and developmental stage of the children you are working with. Use lots of positive reinforcement and encouragement!

- Practice appropriate forms of touch. 3 safe places to touch a child are hand, shoulder and upper back. Never against a person's verbally or non-verbally expressed discomfort, such as crossed arms or stepping back.
- Be aware of the location of emergency information. Fire escape and tornado guidelines and the location of first aid kits are posted near the door of each room.
 - Be mindful about keeping doors open or utilizing doors with windows when working with children and youth.
 - Keep your eyes on your group. Know how many children are there and count them frequently!
- If someone gets hurt or you need assistance, contact the church office. Injury/Accident reports will need to be completed and a copy given to parents/guardians.

Please call, text, or email any of the following if you need assistance:

Church Office: office@strongsvilleumc.org | 440.238.6135

Pastor Dave: daves@strongsvilleumc.org

Pastor Hannah: hannahw@strongsvilleumc.org

Matt Whisenhunt (Pastor of Urban Ministries off-site): MattW@Strongsvilleumc.org | 440-941-6232

Leanne Gruss (Children's Director): leanneg@strongsvilleumc.org | 330.221.0956

Luke George (Youth Director): lukeg@strongsvilleumc.org | 440.340.1012

Quick Reference...

ADULT LEADER GUIDELINE

- Adults who serve with children, youth or vulnerable adults must complete an application, be trained, and have a completed background check on file with the church office.
- Each classroom/meeting space needs to have two adults present at all times for the safety of both the adults and the children/students.
- Registration Forms with emergency/medical information are available in the church office or from the leader in charge of the event.

SUPERVISION OF CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES

A concerted effort will be made to provide two adults for all classroom activities involving children and youth. When two adults are not available, a designated person will periodically check the rooms and be aware of the children/youth's whereabouts if they leave the classroom area. While recognizing the important role of youth volunteers in children's ministries and in an effort to ensure a safe environment, all activities involving children and youth will be supervised by at least one adult who is nineteen years of age or older. Persons supervising activities must be at least five years older than the children or youth they are supervising.

SUPERVISION OF NON-CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES

At least two adults will be present for all non-classroom activities involving children and youth.

OPEN DOOR GUIDELINE

Parents/guardians, volunteers, or staff of the church may visit and observe the program at any time.

Child/Youth Advising

In instances of child/youth conversations where circumstances dictate that conversation will be most effective on a one-on-one basis, church staff may meet individually with a child/youth with the awareness and previous consent of that individual's parent or legal guardian. Exceptions to consent may be made for emergencies. Conversation should take place in an open and/or visible setting. Volunteers should share conversations with the pastors or staff who supervise the ministry they are involved in and encourage student to speak with staff or pastor.

Dismissal from Group Events

In group events, it may be inevitable that one child's or youth's transportation from the event arrives after all other children/youths' transportation has arrived. In those circumstances, a child/youth may unavoidably be in the individual presence of an adult. In the event this circumstance is unavoidable, the adult in charge should exercise best practices for the well-being of vulnerable persons.

Youth are not allowed to leave the church unsupervised during an event without parental permission on file. Parents will be notified of any infractions of this guideline.

OFF-SITE TRIP AND RETREAT SUPERVISION

- There shall be at least two adults present for all trips, retreats, and other times that children/youth gather at or away from the church building.
- There shall be at least one adult of each gender present at co-ed overnight events. At single gender overnight events, at least one of the two or more adults present will be of the same gender as the children/youth.
- In situations where two adults are not available per room where children/youth are staying overnight, then no adult should stay alone in a specific room with the children/youth. Parents should be made aware of housing accommodations.
- Permission slips including permission for emergency medical care shall be carried by the person in charge of each trip and/or retreat.
- Parent must receive contact info to include:
 - start/stop times, location of event, program content, lodging information, covenant rules expected of their child
 - Staff/volunteer/drivers must receive: all contact information for parents, signed parent/guardian permission/liability form, health/emergency information

DRIVING AND TRANSPORTATION

- Drivers must be known to the designated leader of the event.
- Drivers must have a current driver form on file as well as a valid state driver's license, proof of insurance, and be at least 21 years old.
- Drivers must obey all traffic laws and speed limits.
- All passengers including adults must use an individual seat belt while traveling.
- Drivers must transport more than one student at a time
- Students are not permitted to drive as part of youth events, transporting other youth.

SOCIAL MEDIA AND TECHNOLOGY

Given the increased use of technology and social media in the life of the church and its individual members, faith communities have a responsibility to define social media guidelines that uphold the covenant to create Safe Sanctuaries for vulnerable persons. All persons serving in ministries with children, youth and vulnerable persons should following the guidelines for the use of social media, technology and the internet as stated in Strongsville UMC's Safe Sanctuary guideline.

Important highlights Include:

- Volunteers and staff must not post photos or video that identifies vulnerable persons by name, address, or other specific identification on any online site or printed publication without written consent from a parent or legal guardian.
 - Furthermore, volunteers and staff may not post photos or videos of vulnerable persons on their own personal social media accounts including, but not limited to: Facebook, Snapchat, Twitter, Instagram, etc.
- When checking in on Foursquare, Facebook, or any location tagging social media, only “check in” yourself. Never check in minors. Be sensitive to tagging or revealing other participants’ location without their expressed permission. Rather, create a hashtag to facilitate conversation.
- No adult shall initiate social media (Facebook, Snapchat, etc.) contact with or “friend” a vulnerable person. When accepting the “friend” requests of a vulnerable person, care should be taken to respect the ministry and discipleship work of the local faith community to which they belong. Any conversations on Social Media with vulnerable persons shall occur in open channels, or with multiple parties present in the conversation thread.
- When emailing, texting, tweeting, posting or messaging a vulnerable person, adults should copy another adult (ideally a parent or guardian) on the message, or post it in a public venue (i.e. a Facebook wall as opposed to a private message). This will allow adults to maintain the “two adults present” Safe Sanctuaries standard when using social media. Platforms promising discrete conversations and secrecy (Snapchat, etc.) should be avoided.

RESPONSE TO ACCIDENTS, INJURIES, ALLEGATIONS OF ABUSE

- In order to ensure proper attention was given to an injury or accident, an accident/injury report must be completed by the adult supervisor within 24 hours of the incident whenever a vulnerable person is injured. Parents and/or guardians will receive a copy of the Accident/Injury report. (Forms are available in the education office).
- If abuse is suspected by, observed by or disclosed to a volunteer and/or paid staff member of the church, that person must follow reporting requirements and report the incident immediately to the pastor. If that person is uncomfortable reporting the incident to the pastor, then the alleged abuse should be reported to the staff person who supervises that ministry area. A call to 696-KIDS is required as well.

Incident Report
The Child Protection Guidelines of the
STRONGSVILLE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

TURN FORM INTO LEANNE GRUSS OR CAROL WILLIAMS UPON COMPLETION W/IN 24 HOURS

Adult in charge: _____ Church Activity Attended: _____
 Name: _____ Under 18: Y / N
 Parent/Guardian Name (if applicable): _____
 Address: _____ Phone: _____

SITUATION SPECIFICS:

Place of Incident: _____	Date/time of Incident _____
Description of accident: _____ _____ _____	
Place where medical services were given, if any: _____	
Names of others involved, if any: _____	
Was parent notified? Y / N Is this the first episode with this child or a reoccurring problem? _____	
Insurance Claim filed: Y / N If yes, company name: _____	

1. Name: _____	Phone: _____ Email: _____
2. Name: _____	Phone: _____ Email: _____

WITNESSES:

DESCRIPTION OF ACTIONS TAKEN TO RESOLVE ISSUE:

Name of person making report	Signature	Date
- - - - -	- - - - -	- - - - -

Staff/Ministry Leader To Complete
 Worker's Comp Filed: Y / N Follow-up call made? Y / N Date of the call: _____
 Incident reported to: (Leanne, Carol or Pastor signature required) _____