

**ST. JAMES UNITED METHODIST CHURCH**  
**SAFE GATHERINGS POLICY**  
**for the Prevention of Sexual Abuse and Misconduct**  
(for Children, Youth and Vulnerable Adults)

**Introduction to this Policy**

OUR CALLING AS GOD’S PEOPLE IS TO PROMOTE A SAFE HAVEN FOR ALL OF GOD’S PEOPLE.

Throughout the gospels, Jesus provides teachings on providing a peaceable kingdom for all of God’s people, including our most precious gifts, our children and youth. (Matthew 5:9, Luke 18:15-17) The peaceable kingdom begins with sanctuary. Scriptures provide examples of churches and ministries that do provide community of protective nurture and harmony. (Psalms 20:1-2, 27:4-5)

As Christians, we are called to create a protective environment in our churches. We will strive to make them holy, safe and protective communities for all of God’s children, regardless of age or ability. The purpose of this policy is to address the communal responsibility for our children, youth, and vulnerable persons at all sponsored and calendared events of St. James United Methodist Church. The goals of this policy are:

- (1) to take reasonable steps to prevent the opportunity for the occurrence of abuse of children, youth, and vulnerable persons at church sponsored and calendared events,
- (2) to provide safeguards for workers from false accusations and/or suspicions and
- (3) to support all those who minister in the name of Jesus Christ.

These policies and procedures are not based on a lack of trust in workers, but are intended to support and protect our preschoolers, children, youth, vulnerable persons, workers, employees, volunteers and the entire church body.

**Scope of this Policy**

This policy and its provisions shall apply to persons, including all paid and unpaid persons, whether lay or clergy, who have direct contact with children, youth, and vulnerable adults (“Protected Persons”) participating in any activities or events sponsored by the St. James United Methodist Church. This policy is effective as of November 19, 2026.

**Safe Gatherings Certification**

Any adult who is subject to this policy must do the following:

- For volunteers, be regular attendees of St. James United Methodist Church for a minimum of one year before serving directly with children, youth and vulnerable persons
- For new employees, must submit applications and participate in an in-person interview prior to hiring

- Submit to a background check including personal and professional reference checks. St. James United Methodist Church has contracted with Safe Gatherings, Inc. to conduct these checks. Safe Gatherings will contact personal and professional references and conduct the following background checks:
  - National Sex Offenders
  - County Court Records
  - Criminal Background Check
  - Child Maltreatment
  - Adult Maltreatment
  - Motor Vehicle Check
- Complete the online training provided by Safe Gatherings
- Agree to abide by the requirements of this policy
- Renew certification every three years. The Church reserves the right to re-run the background checks any time during the three-year certification time frame. Employees of St. James United Methodist Church will have background checks conducted every year.

Youth are encouraged and supported in serving as volunteers. Any youth wishing to serve as volunteer serving other protected persons must abide by the following:

- Be in the sixth grade or twelve (12) years of age.
- If volunteering with children, the youth must be at least four years older than the children serving.
- If volunteering with vulnerable adults, there must be at least a four-year difference between the youth and the adult(s) being served.
- Be a regular attender of a St. James program for at least one year.
- Youth sixteen (16) years and older must complete the Safe Gatherings volunteer screening and background checks described above
- Youth volunteers younger than 16 will receive special awareness training by SJUMC Staff.

### **Screening Process**

Persons having a criminal history of any of the following types of offenses shall not be allowed to serve in any ministry involving direct contact with children, youth or vulnerable adults:

- Child maltreatment, whether physical, emotional, sexual, or neglectful
- Violent offenses, including murder, rape, assault, domestic violence, and similar offenses
- Drug related conviction (misdemeanor or felony) within the five (5) years immediately prior to application
- Persons having a criminal history of DUI or DWI conviction within the five (5) years immediately prior to application shall not be allowed to act as a driver
- If there are questions regarding an individual's background check or screening, due to special circumstances (including but not limited to: acquittals, discharges, exonerations, pardons, etc.), please notify the District Superintendent or the Conference Safe Gatherings Coordinator for additional information and resources. In the event that a background check reveals activity that calls into question the eligibility of an applicant, the Safe Gatherings Conference Coordinator will be notified. The Safe Gatherings Conference Coordinator will review the reports and will

notify the appropriate District Superintendent, St. James Senior Pastor, and Chairperson of St. James Board of Trustees of the concern raised. The decision on how to proceed with a volunteer's certification shall remain the responsibility of the Board of Trustees..

### **Supervision for Nursery/Childcare:**

- There shall be a minimum of two (2) adults per room and/or within line of sight.
- The State of Arkansas Childcare Minimum Standards [2020-CCC-Clean-Copy.pdf \(arkansas.gov\)](#) must be followed for all Arkansas State Licensed Daycares or schools.
- Childcare will be provided by St. James United Methodist Church free of charge, whenever possible, for church-sponsored & calendared small group or church committee meetings. The meetings must be held within the physical property of St. James.
- Childcare for Church-sponsored events that meet in private homes are considered private arrangements and do not fall under the auspices of this policy. The Church will not be responsible nor be held liable for accidents or injury incurred in small group settings in private homes.

### **Supervision of Children and Youth:**

- All sponsored and calendared church events shall observe the "2 Adult Rule" (2 adults per classroom or 2 adults within line of sight when in large spaces and for one-to-one mentoring or consulting. Understanding that there is safety in numbers, one adult may be in contact with multiple youth (6th -12th grades) so long as they are in line of sight of other adults.
- No adult subject to this policy will be alone in a vehicle with any Protected Person in connection with any sponsored and calendared church event.
- There must be a ratio of at least two adults in attendance at any church sponsored and calendared event. Reference the adult ratio requirements on page 13.
- With permission and instruction from the adult leader, Protected Persons kindergarten and older may be allowed to visit restroom or be allowed to move from one location to another so long as they accompanied by at least one other same gender student of the same age or older. This is referred to as the buddy system.
- Preschool children who wish to use the restroom may be escorted to the bathroom with one adult and another student of the same gender and age group.

### **Overnight Accommodations**

At events that involve overnight accommodations:

- Adults will not sleep, change clothes in the same room nor share a bathroom with children, youth, and vulnerable adults ("Protected Persons.")
- Persons will be housed by the same gender.
- There shall never be fewer than three individuals of the same gender in the same room.
- Adults will enter the sleeping quarters or bathroom of Protected Persons only if there is another adult within line of sight.
- If the housing accommodations do not allow for separate sleeping quarters of adults, then adults must sleep in separate beds or areas from Protected Persons and may not be alone in the room with just one protected person.

## Youth Sexual Misconduct Policy

The St. James UMC Youth Ministries (including but not limited to: Sunday School, Wednesday Night Youth, small groups, retreats, missions, and youth music groups) requires abstinence from any conduct of a sexual nature while participating in any events that youth are present. This includes, but is not limited to: sexual intimacy, sexual relations, telephone sex, texting or apps to send inappropriate messages, pictures, or videos of a sexual nature, romantic kissing or other touching of a romantic or sexual nature, whether between persons of the opposite gender, same gender, or transgender. Violation of this requirement will result in the youth's parent(s) guardian(s) being contacted concerning the conduct and the youth being prohibited from participating in youth activities until there is a meeting to address the violation with the appropriate St. James Staff Member, the youth and the youth's parents or guardian. Limitations on future participation by the youth may be imposed by the appropriate St. James Staff Member based upon the nature of the conduct, including but not limited to, a temporary ban from youth activities involving overnight travel or a requirement that a parent or guardian accompany the youth.

No youth who are in a romantic or sexual relationship shall be permitted to sleep in the same room during youth activities involving an overnight stay. Youth of the same gender who are in a romantic relationship shall not be allowed to room together unless all youth of that same gender sleep in the same room as a large group.

Any conduct that is believed to be a violation of this policy shall be reported to the appropriate St. James Staff person immediately. If the St. James Staff person believes that the conduct requires a report to the child abuse hotline, that staff person will comply with the St. James Safe Gatherings Policy in making the report and notifying other appropriate pastoral staff and the parent(s) or guardian(s) of the youth. If that staff member believes that the conduct may be criminal, the youth director shall report the conduct to law enforcement authorities then consult with the Senior Pastor or other member of the pastoral staff. .

The St. James UMC Youth Ministries understands that youth may consider public displays of affection such as holding hands, hugging, and kissing on the cheek as signs of Christian love and not romantic or sexual in nature. St. James Staff Members will provide guidance on what conduct is permitted and adult volunteers and other St. James UMC Staff Members will remind youth of this policy if it appears that certain questionable conduct may be a violation.

Both the youth and the youth's parent(s) or guardian(s) shall be responsible for complying with this policy. If the youth or the youth's parent(s) or guardian(s) refuse to meet with the appropriate St. James Staff Member following a violation or if there are repeated violations, the youth will not be allowed to participate in any youth activities except Sunday School until the youth and the youth's parent(s) or guardians have agreed to comply with the limitations and additional requirements set by the appropriate St. James Staff Member.

This policy shall not preclude youth from speaking confidentially to the St. James UMC Youth Ministries staff in a ministry capacity concerning issues of a sexual nature. St. James UMC Youth Ministry affirms that all youth are of sacred worth. Youth may need the ministry care and

support of the St. James UMC Youth Ministry regarding issues of a sexual nature, and that ministry care and support will be provided in a confidential and appropriate Christian manner unless the youth's parent(s) or guardian(s) have instructed the youth ministry staff not to minister with the youth concerning matters of a sexual nature. The youth who seeks ministering will be advised that if the ministering reveals that there has been a violation of the St. James UMC Youth Sexual Conduct policy while the youth was participating in a St. James youth event, the youth's parent(s) or guardian(s) will be notified per the requirements of this policy. If, however, the ministering does not relate to any conduct that is a violation of this policy and simply seeks ministering regarding matters of sexual nature that are not related to conduct while participating in St. James youth events, the information communicated to the St. James United Methodist Church staff during the ministering shall remain confidential.

### **Reporting of Incidents & Policy Violations**

1. St. James has a zero-tolerance policy for acts of abuse. As stated in our purpose – we strive to provide nurturing, caring, safe environment for protected persons. Therefore, if you witness, suspect or have any knowledge of abuse taking place on church property or at church related events, you must report said abuse.
2. If you observe indicators “red-flags” of abuse, please discuss these concerns immediately with the appropriate staff member
3. Anyone can report abuse; however, mandated reporters are required by law to immediately report the following:
  - suspected or observed abuse,
  - neglect or exploitation of children, youth and endangered or impaired adults or
  - observes a child being subjected to conditions or circumstances that would reasonably result in child maltreatment. See, Ark. Code Ann. 12-18-402 et. seq.. . This includes child care workers and clergy among others.
4. Reporters should address any needs the Protected Person may have, medical or otherwise. Report to the parent(s) and/or legal guardians(s) unless the suspected abuser is a parent or guardian.
5. When an adult who is subject to this policy has a reasonable suspicion that maltreatment is taking or has taken place, he or she shall immediately report the abuse to the Arkansas Child Abuse Hotline (800-252-5400). If there is immediate danger, call 911 as well. The reporter shall thereafter contact the administrator or event leader immediately, and cooperate fully with the investigation conducted by law enforcement officials or child protective services. No adult is required in any way to seek consultation or permission from anyone before making a report to the Child Abuse Hotline.
6. The person reasonably suspected of abuse shall, for the safety and well-being of the Protected Persons, be removed with dignity from further contact with the Protected Persons until an appropriate investigation has taken place. If the adult event leader is the suspected person, then the report should be made to that person's supervisor.
7. The events surrounding the suspicion should be documented, including the following:
  - a. The name of the person who reasonably suspects maltreatment is being or has taken place, including the date, time and place of the suspected event.

- b. The alleged victim's name, age, and date of birth.
  - c. Documentations of conversations with the victim, if any. Only law enforcement and Department of Human Services personnel are to interview the victim and accused to avoid interference with law enforcement investigations.
  - d. Name of the person suspected of maltreatment, the date, time and place of any conversation or any statement made by him or her, if applicable but do not attempt to interview the person.
  - e. Any action taken, i.e. removal of the suspected person from further contact with Protected Persons.
  - f. Date and time of call to the Arkansas Child Maltreatment Hotline, name of worker taking the report, the content of that conversation, and case number assigned.
  - g. Date and time of call to law enforcement and /or medical care providers, if applicable, and the name of officer/caregiver spoken to and content of that conversation.
  - h. Date and time of any other contacts made regarding the suspected incident.
6. Notify the Executive Director of Ministries and the Senior Pastor immediately.
  7. It shall be the goal to provide supportive care to both the victim and the accused and to restore such persons to wholeness whenever possible. Supportive care can include, for example, the procedures of the criminal justice system, provisions of the *Book of Discipline*, appropriate counseling referrals, and continued pastoral visitation.
  8. To encourage individuals to report suspected or known abuse, there will be no retaliation towards those who support and follow this policy.
  9. Information collected regarding background checks, and whether a person was accepted or rejected as a Safe Gatherings Certified person will be retained by Safe Gatherings.
  10. Failure to comply with this policy or failing to report abuse is not acceptable and will lead to the volunteer's Safe Gatherings Certification being revoked.

## **Media Response**

The Senior Pastor shall be informed of all known investigations or allegations of abuse that involve any protected person or church employee. In order to avoid any interference with ongoing investigations or further hurting any potential victim, media inquiries, if any, should be directed to the Senior Pastor. Do not give out any information. Simply state that all inquiries will be answered through the Senior Pastor or his/her designee.

## **Implementation of this Policy**

The Arkansas Annual Conference and St. James United Methodist Church has contracted with Safe Gatherings, Inc. (<https://safegatherings.com>) to be responsible for all background checks, reference checks, trainings, and maintaining documentation for the Conference, as well as for local churches.

Any certification dated July 1, 2022 or earlier has expired. Safe Gatherings training and certification will be required. This applies to clergy, paid staff, and volunteers.

## **Oversight and Amendments to this Policy**

- An advisory Safe Gatherings Committee shall be formed and it will include: the Director of Student Ministries, the Director of Children's Ministries, the Director of Nursery Ministries, the Executive Director of Ministries, and the Executive Director of Finance and Administration (his/her designated representative Additional Staff or church members may be included on the advisory committee when necessary)
- The Advisory Committee will be responsible for reviewing this policy at least annually, provide written notice to the Board of Trustees the review has been complete, and updating with editorial changes as needed. All substantive changes shall be submitted first to the Senior Pastor and Executive Team for preliminary approval and then to the Board of Trustees for final approval.
- The Executive Director of Ministries shall ensure that all new program staff hired shall receive Safe Gatherings training within ten (10) days of their start date. The Executive Director of Finance & Administration (or his/her designated representative) shall ensure that all other new staff receive Safe Gatherings training within thirty (30) days of their start date.

## **SOCIAL MEDIA AND SAFE GATHERINGS**

Giving the increased use of technology and social media in the life of the church and its individual members, churches and conferences have a responsibility to define social media policies that uphold the covenant to create Safe Gatherings for children, youth and vulnerable adults. To this end, St. James United Methodist Church affirms the following and asks all volunteers to sign a Media Use Covenant.

- A. We will utilize technology, the internet and all social media tools to promote Christian community and the building up of authentic relationships.
- B. We will protect the privacy and identity of all persons under the age of 18 years of age and all vulnerable adults in online writings, postings, and discussions.
  1. Adult employees and volunteers must not post photos or videos that identify protected persons on any online site or printed publication without written consent from a parent or legal guardian.
  2. All church-related social media groups and pages (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, etc.) must have at least two administrators. One of the administrators must be the Creative Director. If an administrator is no longer associated with the ministry, that individual's administrative status must be revoked.

3. At this time, any form of social media, (i.e. Snap Chat, Tik Tok, etc.) in which information cannot be retained is not an acceptable form of communication. No adult will initiate or respond to communications that cannot be retained involving minors and will report any undocumented communications from a minor to the minor's parent(s) or guardian.
  4. Photos of minors may only be published or posted after a photo release has been signed by their parent/guardian. Photos used in other mediums, such as church newsletters, websites, blogs, twitpics, etc., must not include any identifying information of minors.
  5. Photos may only be posted on social media pages 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.
  6. When checking in or location tagging on any type of social media or online only "check-in" yourself. Never check in minors or groups of minors. Be sensitive to tagging or revealing other participants' location without their expressed permission. Rather, create a hashtag to facilitate conversation.
  7. In the case of clergy and staff online connections with minors, Friend Requests, Follow Request, etc. must be initiated by the minor and parents informed of the online connection
- C. We will maintain appropriate relational boundaries with minors.
1. No adult shall initiate social media "friend" status with a minor. An accepting the "friend" requests of minors is up to the discretion of the adult. Regardless of the decision that is reached, this practice should be uniformly practiced by all adult staff and volunteers. Any conversations with minors shall occur in open channels.
  2. When emailing, texting, or using any form of a messaging platform, a minor, adults should copy another adult (ideally a parent or guardian) on the message, or post it in a public venue (i.e. Facebook as opposed to private message). This will allow adults to maintain the "two adults present" Safe Gatherings standard when using social media. If necessary, in the judgment of the person receiving the communication, then parents/guardians will be notified of the communication. Notwithstanding the foregoing, if the communication involves information that leads the person receiving the communication to believe that the minor may be in danger or about to commit an act that will harm the minor or others, the details of the communication shall be communicated to the parent.
  3. Social media, even though it offers convenient and private channels, is not an appropriate medium for counseling – especially with minors. Begin or transition a pastoral conversation into an approved Safe Gatherings model.

## **Digital Safe Gatherings**

Digital gatherings of Protected Persons shall follow the same guidelines and principles as in-person gatherings. This includes having two unrelated adults participate in the digital gathering. All digital meetings are to be recorded. Parent/guardian will be notified that meetings are recorded prior to the event. All records should be made and maintained for a minimum of three years.

Leaders should be dressed appropriately and set expectations for children and youth to also dress appropriately while attending virtual meetings.

Leaders should be cognizant of their surroundings when conducting online meetings to make sure there are no inappropriate backgrounds or items in the room from which they are streaming. Some examples of inappropriate items might be alcohol, smoking materials, or adult themed materials.

Parents/Guardians will be notified of any inappropriate activity reasonably suspected to have occurred or if there are other concerns about online interactions.

### **Virtual Worship**

Leaders should not take photos or post images or videos of the online sessions without parental permission. Sample permission forms are available through the Arkansas Conference Office.

Leaders should consider the following recommendations regarding virtual services that include “children’s time” or performances by any Protected Person:

- Do not to identify any children by last name
- Inform parents/guardians that videos taken at worship services and Conference or District event performances that are part of a streamed service will be shared publicly

### **Digital Communication**

- Leaders should take care in all messaging, whether it is via group text or an online meeting. Inappropriate statements or any attempt to initiate inappropriate conduct of any sort will not be tolerated.
- Leaders should not use electronic communication to post or discuss sensitive topics, including those of a violent or sexual nature.
- All participants communicating via digital communication will use proper names and profile pictures.
- A ministry staff member or volunteer working with Protected Persons should not have one-on-one interaction with any Protected Person, including text messages, online chats, or via other technology means. Parents should be included in online correspondence and invitations to remote activities for children and youth.
- If an adult subject to this policy receives inappropriate communication from a Protected Person, they should tell the program leader immediately and save the correspondence. Depending on the nature of the communication, if maltreatment or an attempt to solicit is reasonably suspected, the adult should report the incident to the Arkansas Child Abuse Hotline
- In mentoring situations, where the conversations are appropriately one-on-one, this should be done in an open area or where there is a way to encourage transparency in the virtual environment, such as including another adult in the mentoring – even in digital communication – as one possible solution.
- Organization or event leaders should be encouraged to attend and drop in on virtual sessions taking place with Protected Persons.

### **Anti-retaliation and False Allegations**

St. James prohibits retaliation made against any employee, volunteer, board member or other person who lodges a good faith complaint of sexual abuse or misconduct or who participates in any related investigation. Making knowingly-false or malicious accusations of sexual abuse or misconduct can have serious consequences for those who are wrongly accused. St. James prohibits making false or malicious

sexual misconduct allegations, as well as deliberately providing false information during an investigation. Anyone who violates this rule is subject to disciplinary action, up to and including termination of employment or membership and criminal prosecution.

## Definitions

### Abuse:

- **Physical Abuse** is any deliberate act that inflicts bodily harm to a person beyond transitory red marks.
- **Sexual Abuse** is any unwanted sexual contact with anyone or sexual contact of any sort with a minor
- **Verbal Abuse** is when a person forcefully insults or denounces someone else characterized by underlying anger and hostility, which is intended to harm the other person. This includes suggestive comments, name calling, and etc.
- **Neglect** is failure to provide nutrition or medical, surgical, or any other care necessary for the well-being of the Protected Person.

**Children as used in this Policy** are persons 0-11 years of age or birth to fifth (5<sup>th</sup>) grade.

**Safe Gatherings Certification** (see pages 1 & 2 for details)

**Conference Safe Gatherings Coordinator** is the appointed conference staff person that is trained in reviewing background check terminology and findings. This individual is responsible for reviewing any background checks that are flagged and is responsible for informing the District Superintendent, local church pastor, and Chair of Board of Trustees, of the background check findings.

**Local Church Certification Coordinator** is designated by the local church and assumes responsibility for ensuring the local church policy is followed and Safe Gatherings Certification is conducted.

**Mandated Reporter** is someone who is required by state law to report reasonably suspected maltreatment. This includes but is not limited to clergy, doctors, nurses, teachers, and daycare workers. In the State of Arkansas, anyone who is employed by a place of worship is a mandated reporter.

**Ministry Event** is defined as an event, program, or other gathering that is sponsored and calendared by St. James United Methodist Church, whether it be on campus or off-campus.

**Participants** are Protected Persons who are registered, enrolled, attending or otherwise participating in an event or activity sponsored and calendared by St. James United Methodist Church.

**Protected Person** – Children, Youth and any adult who is particularly vulnerable to abuse due to advanced age or mental or physical disability.

**Regular Attendee** – A person who has been attending worship on an average of at least once a

month for the past twelve months.

**Staff** includes any clergyperson, any paid employee of St. James United Methodist Church.

**Supervision** is the ability of a person to supervise a group of Protected Persons, including giving direction, setting boundaries, correcting appropriately, maintaining a safe environment, and being the guiding adult in all situations. This includes the ability to take immediate and appropriate action when policies or procedures are reasonably suspected of being violated.

**Volunteer** is any unpaid non-clergy, lay worker who has any responsibility at any level for the care or supervision of a Participant at an event.

**Vulnerable adults** means adults of any age who lack the functional, mental, or physical ability to care for themselves.

**Youth as used in this Policy** are 12-18 years of age or sixth (6<sup>th</sup>) -twelfth (12<sup>th</sup>) grade.

This is the end of the Safe Gatherings policy.

**Acknowledgement Form: Safe Gatherings Policy for the Prevention of Sexual Abuse and Misconduct**

I acknowledge that I received and read the Sexual Abuse and Misconduct Prevention Policy and/or had it explained to me. I understand that it is my responsibility to abide by all rules contained in the policy. I also understand how to report incidents of sexual abuse or misconduct as set forth in the policy, including retaliation against any employee or volunteer exercising his or her rights under the policy. I acknowledge that I will be alerted when changes and updates are made to the Sexual Abuse and Misconduct Policy and will be responsible for reading and complying with these updates.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Witness's Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

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

# SAFE GATHERINGS BEST PRACTICES

Policies define the boundaries of acceptable behavior in an organization. Because offenders often violate policies to gain access to Children or Vulnerable Adults, knowing and understanding the Church's Policy regarding Safety of Children and Vulnerable Adults will empower pastors, staff, and volunteers to **identify**, **interrupt**, and **report** violations. Simply interrupting a policy violation can prevent a false allegation of abuse or put an offender on notice that the rules apply to everyone and violations will not be tolerated.

**Physical Contact.** The Church's Best Practices relating to physical contact encourage a positive, nurturing environment while protecting Children, Vulnerable Adults, Staff, and volunteers. Any inappropriate physical interaction must be reported as a violation of Policy.

## ***Appropriate Physical Interactions***

- Side hugs
- Pats on the shoulder or back
- Handshakes
- High fives and fist bumps
- Holding hands to escort young children

## ***Inappropriate Physical Interactions***

- 
- Full-frontal hugs
- Kisses
- Showing affection in private
- Lap sitting
- Wrestling
- Piggyback rides
- Tickling
- Allowing older children to cling to a Staff or volunteer's leg (pre-school aged children will be redirected as soon as circumstances permit)
- Any type of massage given by or to a Protected Person
- Any form of affection that is unwanted by the Protected Person, Staff, or volunteer
- Compliments relating to physique or body development
- Touching bottom, chest, or genital areas except as required for diapering and bathroom assistance in accordance with Best Practices

**Verbal Interaction.** Staff and volunteers are prohibited from speaking to Protected People in a way that is, or could be construed by a reasonable observer, as overly harsh, coercive, threatening, intimidating, shaming, derogatory, demeaning, or humiliating. Staff and volunteers may not initiate or engage in sexually oriented conversations with Protected People. Any inappropriate verbal interaction must be reported as a violation of Policy. ***Appropriate Verbal Interactions***

### ***Appropriate Verbal Interactions***

- Positive reinforcement
- Appropriate jokes
- Encouragement
- Praise

### ***Inappropriate Verbal Interactions***

- 
- Name-calling
- Discussing sexual encounters
- Involving Children or Vulnerable Adults in the personal problems and issues of Staff or volunteers
- Secrets
- Cursing
- Off-color or sexual jokes or innuendo
- Shaming
- Belittling
- Harsh language that may frighten, threaten, or humiliate
- Derogatory remarks about a Child, Vulnerable Adult, or their family, characteristics or attributes

**One-on-One Interaction.** Most abuse occurs when an adult is alone with a Child or Vulnerable Adult. Program/Team Directors are encouraged to consult with the Executive Team to develop protocols to address situations where their ministry might anticipate one-on-one interactions (for example, counseling a youth, care home visits, an emergency medical situation, etc.). In those situations where one-on-one interactions are necessary, Staff and volunteers should consider the following additional guidelines to manage the risk of abuse or false allegations of abuse:

### ***Guidelines for One-on-One Interactions***

- When meeting one-on-one with a Protected Person, do so in a public place where you are in full view of others
- Depart from the public place separately
- Get parental or guardian consent before meeting if not an emergency
- Avoid physical affection that could be misinterpreted
- Schedule the meeting to be held at the Church
- If meeting in a room or office, leave the door open and move to an area that can be easily observed by others passing by
- Inform other Staff and volunteers that you are alone with a Protected Person and ask them to drop in unannounced
- Share your calendar with your supervisor and promptly report any unscheduled event resulting in 1:1 time with a Protected Person
- If a Protected Person is the first to arrive or last to be picked up, wait outside. If bad weather, remain near the entry with the door open
- Document and immediately report any unusual incidents, including disclosures of abuse or maltreatment, behavior problems and how they were handled, injuries, or any interactions that might be misinterpreted
- Even where families are friends outside of Church, the perception of the behavior is important. Staff and volunteers should not be alone with a child who is not their own

### **Roving Superintendent/Extra Helper**

Staff and lay individuals who are Safe Gatherings certified shall monitor classroom hallways. These individuals are available to assist with situations in the classrooms and to watch for the safety of the children in the hallways.

### **Gifts**

**All adults who work with protected persons shall not request gifts from protected persons.**

### **Health Emergencies**

First-aid kits are located in Welcome Center Kitchen, Jones Hall Kitchen, Mountaintop Kitchen, music bell choir room, Youth Area Entrance (CLC) and CLC Kitchen.

AED devices are located in Upper Peck, outside of Jones Hall, CLC gym, and outside the GR elevator doors

If you call 911, please try to get word to a staff member or adult volunteer who can go to the parking lot to guide the emergency personnel to the correct location. It is imperative to alert the office as soon as possible so that the necessary support can be given to the situation. Once the situation has been handled appropriately, please write a report of the incident and submit the report to the appropriate Program Director or Church Administrator.

### **Beginning and Ending of Programs**

Children ages 5 years and younger must be registered or signed-in by a parent or guardian at the beginning of a program. Information should include the child's name, parent's name, and contact information, location of parent during a program, and any allergies or special needs the child may have. If children will be regularly participating in church programs, then each child should have a consent/emergency health release form on file.

### **Restroom Assistance (Ages 0-11)**

It is not appropriate to be alone with a child of any age (other than your own) in the bathroom.

**Infant:** Diapering should be done in the nursery by a parent/legal guardian, staff person or regular volunteer. Diapering should be done out in the open, never in a secluded area or without the presence of other workers. Closed bathroom doors are never permitted.

**Toddler potty training:** If a toddler has an accident in underwear/clothing, ideally the parent/legal guardian should change the clothing. If the parent cannot be reached, workers or staff can change the underwear/clothing provided there is paperwork on file for this type of situation.

**Children who are potty-trained:** These children can use the bathroom on their own unless special help is required or the child is too young to use the restroom without assistance. For instance, a 2-year-old may be potty-trained, but the child may still need supervision for safety reasons. After the worker has ensured that the bathroom is clear, the worker should wait outside the bathroom door, which should remain slightly open. Workers should never be in a closed-door situation with a child or assist them without the child's request and another worker present.

**Children or youth with special needs:** Diapers or soiled clothes should be changed by a family member or an adult staff member with another adult as a helper. There should be paperwork on file that specifically addresses this situation so that all parties are informed.

For classrooms without restrooms, children in 1<sup>st</sup> grade and up may be sent to the restroom in pairs. If an adult needs to accompany the child, please remain outside the restroom in the hallway while the child is in the restroom. Should a situation arise in which an older child needs assistance, enlist the help of another adult so that two adults are present with the child. If this is a situation which is likely to be “on-going”, (such as a child with special needs), please make sure that the appropriate Program Director is alerted so that a more permanent system can be put into place.

**Child to Adult Ratio**

The Church has a goal of maintaining the following ratios of ministry workers to children whenever feasible. These ratios are goals.

Program	Workers	Children
Nursery	2	10
Sunday School	2	16
Middle School Youth Programs	2	20
High School Youth Programs	2	24
Mid-week Classes	2	14
VBS	2	16

The Church recognizes that in some circumstances achieving these ratios may not be feasible, such as an unexpected number of Children showing up for an event. Youth Volunteers are not be counted in the ratio of worker to children. When it becomes apparent or likely that the ratios cannot be achieved, the Leader(s) for the event shall contact the Executive Director of Ministries promptly to determine if church staff or other Leaders are available to attend the event to achieve the required ratios. In consultation with the Executive Director of Ministries, the Leader(s) may determine that no additional Protected Persons may be admitted to the event due to the lack of enough leaders. If the Executive Director of Ministries and the Leader(s) mutually agree that the particular event does not pose a serious risk to the additional Protected Persons due to the nature of the event (e.g., the event is in contained classroom setting such as a Sunday School room with other Leaders in close proximity or a youth event where other

youth groups and their leaders are in one room together an event such as a rally), then the additional Protected Persons may be admitted for that particular event without achieving the required ratios so long as the ratio request is not exceeded by 25%. If the ratio is exceeded three or more times for regularly scheduled events during a sixty-day (60 day) period, staff shall not allow the ratio to be exceeded thereafter and any Protected Persons who seek to attend the event shall not be admitted unless and until there are sufficient leaders to meet the required ratio.

### **Sign-In Guidelines**

1. Children, ages infant through fifth grade, must be checked in using the check-in computers when they are away from their parent/guardian. These computers are located in the nursery hallway, Music area, Youth area, and Entrance 3 kiosk. Parents check their children in at one of the seven check-in stations that are located around the church (either manual or self-guided). Once a family's information is in the computer, check-in process should take no more than a few seconds.
2. All children will have a customized name tag printed. Infants-24 months of age should wear their name badges on their back. Children two years and older should have name badges on their front, clearly visible.
3. Parents of Infants-two years of age will receive a second name badge. This is considered the security receipt for your child. When picking up the child from their church event, the parent will have to show the corresponding name badge to the leader in order for the child to be released.
4. In the event that computers are down, a paper sign-in system will be used. Parents will sign their child in at their nursery or Sunday School room. They will receive a badge with two parts – one for their child and one for the parent. Both will have a matching code that will be used when picking up the child. All other procedures remain the same

### **Open Door Policy**

Parents, guardians or caretakers of the Protected Persons involved in a ministry program, the clergy, administrative and professional staff of the church have the right to visit and observe the children's/youth activity, classroom, or church-sponsored program at any time, unannounced.

### **Doors and Windows**

All classroom and office doors will have a window or a door will remain open while occupied by a Protected Person. Inside windows will be kept free from adornment that obstructs visibility into a room from the hallway. If an event requires anyone to have the ability to change clothes, then gender specific changing rooms will be provided. If the room provided has windows, then the window will be blocked for privacy purposes and will be supervised in accordance to these policies. Once all clothes have been changed, all windows are to be unblocked.

### **Church Sponsored & Calendared Events Away from Church Property**

All Protected Persons participating in out-of-town and over-night outings must have written consent, release of liability and a medical release form. These forms may be completed for a one-year period and must be renewed annually.

There must be access to a phone or cell phone when groups are away from the Campus. It is preferred that on outings away from the Campus at least one adult be certified in CPR and First Aid. If the outing involves water activities such as swimming, it is suggested that a certified lifeguard accompany the group.

### **Church Sponsored & Calendared Overnight Outings**

In no circumstance is one adult (other than the parent) to take one or more Protected Persons on an overnight outing alone.

1. On all overnight outings, the ratio of adult to Protected Person supervision shall be observed.
2. A female Leader will supervise female Protected Persons in or adjacent to their sleeping quarters and a male Leader will supervise male Protected Persons in or adjacent to their sleeping quarters.
3. An adult and Protected Person will not occupy the same bed, sleeping bag or tent.
4. In hotels/motels and personal dwellings, there should be a minimum of three Protected Persons to each room with four being preferred.
5. Leaders and Qualified Adult Volunteers will provide adequate and appropriate supervision.
6. All adults in the presence of Protected Persons will conduct themselves appropriately. This includes, but is not limited to, changing clothes behind closed doors, and wearing appropriate sleeping attire and swim attire.

### **Fire Alarms**

In the case of an alarm, evacuation must take place immediately if Sunday School or other events involving children are in session. Evacuate the building and stay outside until an all-clear signal has been given (usually this will come from a staff member). A fire evacuation map is located in each classroom.

### **Appropriate Discipline**

Children should be made aware that appropriate behavior is expected at all local, district, and conference events. Ensuring that children, youth, and parents are aware of the rules is vital. Gentle reminders are always necessary when dealing with children. When these reminders don't work, then discipline needs to move to the next step. In cases where behavior has to be addressed, it is best if persons who know the child (such as the child's Sunday School teacher, choir leader, etc.) are called in to help handle the situation. In no case is physical discipline an appropriate measure to deal with problems except in the rare situation of having to reasonably restrain a child who is threatening harm to him/herself or to others. A reasonable response might include a period of "time-out" for the child. This should be done with necessary supervision keeping safe Gatherings guidelines in mind. Keeping parents involved is important. They need to be kept up-to-date on their child's behavior. For serious

offenses, the appropriate response will be to send the child home immediately. Parents and the Program Director or his/her designee will make the proper arrangements.

### **Appropriate Physical and Emotional Boundaries**

Physical boundaries are most important in dealing with children and youth. Those working with children and youth have to understand and respect those boundaries. Obviously these boundaries change, as children grow older. A young child sitting on the lap of a caregiver is most appropriate whereas an older child or youth sitting on a leader's lap would not be acceptable. Hugs and kisses from a toddler to a leader are very appropriate. However, hugs and kisses between youth and adults may not be appropriate. Other inappropriate behavior includes but is not limited to: wrestling, tickling, massage, and kissing.

Emotional boundaries are most important also. As a child grows older it is important for the leader to maintain appropriate boundaries in relationships. It is important that those working with children and youth not step outside of those lines and allow the younger person to become too attached to them. It is important that the older person be careful where conversations might lead and to steer clear of inappropriate talk. When a leader recognizes that there might be an issue with these boundaries, they should allow space to come between them and the child in question. If that does not solve the problem then contact the appropriate Program Director for assistance.

**If a Protected Person Discloses Abuse.** First and foremost, listen to their story and consider the following guidelines:

- Provide a safe environment to talk with the person. Make sure you are visible to others but will not be interrupted
- Ask the person if it is okay to include another trusted adult in the conversation
- Document your recollection of the conversation in writing either during or as soon after the conversation as possible to provide accurate information to your supervisor, ministry lead or other appropriate person of authority
- Comfort and sit near the person, but do not touch them without them initiating contact
- Stay calm. Do not express shock, as that may affect their comfort level
- Reassure the person they did nothing wrong and that you believe them
- Try to get who/what/when/where details but do not "interrogate" the person or lead their responses. Listen to the explanation
- Be supportive, not judgmental
- If they ask to keep the information a secret, respond honestly. "I will not tell other children or workers but I may have to tell someone who can help you."
- Examples of what to say:
  - Thank you for telling me.
  - I am sorry this happened to you.
  - I'll do my best to get help for you.
  - How are you feeling right now?
  - What are you most worried about?
  - You are very brave to tell me this, and it's okay to be upset.
- Do not say:
  - You can tell me anything; I promise I won't tell anyone else.
  - I promise I will never let this happen again.
  - The person who did this is terrible / sick / should go to jail.

**If You Witness Abuse.** If you see something, say something! When you have witnessed behavior that causes concern but the Protected Person has not disclosed abuse to you, you should:

***If You Witness Abuse***

- Consult with a supervisor immediately. If that supervisor is of concern, go up your chain of command or to a member of the Executive Team or Chairperson of Staff Parish Relations Committee.
- Keep a written record of the concerns and your follow-up actions
- Name specific behaviors you have seen and state your reaction
- In an emergency, call 911
- Consider your duties if a mandatory reporter. Remember all employees of St. James are mandatory reporters.