

Hereford Faith & Life Church (HUMC) Safe
Sanctuary Policy (SSP)

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Hereford Faith & Life Church Safe Sanctuary Policy

Introduction:

Following the words of Jesus who said, “Whoever welcomes a child welcomes me” (Matthew 18:5), we vow to foster, nurture and nourish a safe and loving sanctuary at the Hereford Faith & Life Church (HUMC). Jesus heeded all, “If any of you put a stumbling block before one of these little ones, 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 18:6). Hereford Faith & Life Church is committed to upholding biblical principles of protecting children and preventing abuse. Hereford Faith & Life Church is an inclusive and welcoming congregation. Building upon our historical commitment in discipleship through our loving service, protecting children and youth is a top priority at our church. The purpose of this Safe Sanctuary Policy is to address the safety of our children and youth, and those responsible for their care. The Safe Sanctuary Policy is under the auspices of the Church Council. Copies are available in the church, on the church website, and in the church office.

I. The Safe Sanctuary Team

1. The Safe Sanctuary policy is administered by the Safe Sanctuary Team (SST).
2. The Safe Sanctuary Team consists of, as minimum, a co-chair of a male and a female member and the pastor (Lead). The pastor appoints the members of the team. The names of the SST are posted in the Church Office and the Members Connect.

SST Responsibilities include:

1. Educating the congregation, volunteers, and all employees about the policy.
2. Receiving reports/allegations about any alleged abuse.
3. Answering any questions about the policy.
4. Ensuring compliance with the policy.
5. Interpreting the policy.
6. Leading initial investigations.
7. Assisting, as needed, with any civil investigations.
8. Reviewing the policy annually or as needed and providing recommended changes to the Church Council.
9. Initiating required background checks.
10. Maintaining the security of the information gathered by their duties
11. Other duties as needed.

II. Definitions of terms:

For purpose of understanding policy: *Maryland Department of Human Resources, Child Protective Services, Code of Maryland Regulations Section 07.02.07. – 03/04/2008.

A. Child – anyone 12 and under.

B. Youth – anyone 13 to 17 years old.

C. Young adult – 18 – 20 years old.

D. Adult – anyone 21 years and older.

E. Immediate Family – Parents, Guardians, Siblings, Grandparents.

F. Staff – Paid positions of the church supervised by SPPRC, as well as pastor(s) under appointment to the church.

G. Leader – anyone directly responsible for supervision and oversight of a specific church related function, event or activity.

H. Joining of the activity – The moment in which a youth or child becomes part of the group for the activity: meeting at the church, pick-up in route or at the event location. The leader takes responsibility for the safety of attendees at the time of their joining the activity.

I. *Child Abuse – means physical injury, not necessarily visible, of a child (anyone under the age of 18 years), under circumstances that indicate that the child’s health or welfare is harmed or at substantial risk of being harmed.

J. *Child neglect – means the failure to give proper care and attention to a child (anyone under the age of 18 years) including leaving of a child unattended under circumstances that indicate that the child’s health or welfare is harmed or placed at substantial risk of harm.

K. *Sexual abuse – means an act or acts involving sexual molestation or exploitation, whether physical injuries are sustained or not.

L. *Mental injury – means the observable, identifiable, and substantial impairment of a child’s mental or psychological ability to function.

M. *Indicated – means a finding that there is credible evidence, which has not been satisfactorily refuted, that physical abuse, neglect, or sexual abuse did occur.

N. *Ruled Out – means a finding that abuse, neglect, or sexual abuse did not occur.

O. *Unsubstantiated – means a finding that there is an insufficient amount of evidence to support a finding of “Indicated” or “Ruled Out”.

III. Documentation

- A. All printed material with sensitive data will be stored in a secured location at the church.
- B. Upon request, all printed material will be returned to the volunteer or staff member at the end of the church's need.
- C. Any record generated from requirements of this document will be stored in a secured location at the church.
- D. All documents and information produced by the SST will be marked and treated with confidentiality.
- E. Access to the SST documents will be limited to those with a need to know.

IV. Screening

A. Paid staff:

1. Before employment commences, a current background check will be completed. The background check may or may not include a review of criminal histories, motor vehicle records, and registered sexual offenders' databases.

a) Any background check information that raises concerns of the Safe Sanctuary Team (SST) will be discussed with the Pastor. This is the intent of this policy that it is preferable to err on the side of caution in protecting our children and youth.

b) Results of the screens are confidential. Safe Sanctuary Forms will be destroyed after completion of the background checks. Background check reports will be stored in hard copy form with sensitive data removed. 2. Paid staff will have background checks repeated every 4 years by the church. 3. Paid staff will receive safe sanctuary orientation and sign that they agree to follow these policies.

2. Volunteers:

1. All volunteers working with children and/or youth are encouraged to be involved in the life of HUMC before they are eligible for leadership in an area.

2. Any adult volunteer working with children or youth within the church agrees that:

a) All adult volunteers shall receive safe sanctuary orientation, agree to a background check every two years, and complete the safe sanctuary forms.

b) All adult volunteers shall complete the Sexual Misconduct Form annually as required by the Baltimoreh Washington Conference of the United Methodist Church.

c) The SST will perform an initial background check.

d) Volunteers understand that SST may periodically execute and review background checks, and the pastor may receive and interpret them.

e) All completed background information forms will be destroyed upon completion of background checks. Background check reports will be stored in hard copy form with sensitive data removed.

f) The SST reserves the right to limit the activities of volunteers with youth or children based on the results of the background check.

g) The SST will inform the appropriate leaders of children and youth activities of any volunteer whose contact must be restricted.

3. Leaders of programs for children and youth (Sunday School, choirs, etc.) must verify that all youth program volunteers have completed background checks and have been approved for service.

a) The approved volunteer list should be made available in the church office or from any SST member.

b) Program leaders are responsible for providing completed Safe Sanctuary forms in a timely manner to the SST.

c) Background checks must be performed before volunteers can serve.

d) Adults who do not routinely assist with a program (and have not completed the Safe Sanctuary approval process) but offer to help for a particular event may do so provided they are eligible to work with the children and youth of the church and provided the approved program leaders take responsibility to ensure that children and youth are not supervised by or left alone with anyone but the approved program leaders. These adults who do not routinely assist with a program may not assist with overnight events; only Safe Sanctuary approved adults may supervise overnight events.

4. Driving:

1. Hierarchy of driving preferences for any Church related function beginning from the joining of the activity.

a) A responsible adult, at least 25 years old, should drive children and youth.

b) If the above is not practical, a licensed youth or young adult may drive himself or herself with parental permission.

c) If the above is not practical, siblings may ride together with parental permission.

d) Hereford Faith & Life Church strongly discourages allowing drivers under the age of 25 to drive other children or youth to church sponsored events.

2. Drivers to activities involving children or youth will sign a form stating that they have a safe driving record, are properly insured, their vehicle is in good working order, and will adhere to the laws

governing the safe operation of a motor vehicle. Hereford Faith & Life Church may keep a copy of their driver's license and store it in a secure place. The driver may request the return of documentation at the end of the need for the information.

V. Registered Sex Offenders

A. If a sex offender or sexually violent predator is identified in the church, the following steps will be taken:

1. The pastor will notify the Safe Sanctuary Team or if the Safe Sanctuary Team identifies the offender first, the Safe Sanctuary Team will notify the pastor.
2. Baltimore County Police/Sherriff and/or court shall be contacted to obtain, in writing, any court ordered restrictions on the offender.
3. The Safe Sanctuary Team will notify church leaders, Sunday School teachers, and volunteers who work with children and youth.
4. The Safe Sanctuary Team will notify others as deemed appropriate by the pastor and/or the Safe Sanctuary Team.
5. All discussions will be conducted with utmost discretion.

B. Registered sex offenders and sexually violent predators (the registrants) who attend Hereford Faith & Life Church should be treated with dignity and respect while being afforded the opportunity to worship and grow spiritually. However, registered sex offenders and sexually violent predators who are known to the church are subject to the following guidelines:

1. The registrant may not serve in a leadership role or position of authority over children or youth.
2. The registrant must abide by any restrictions as set by the court.
3. The registrant must agree to be monitored at all times while on church property. It is the responsibility of the registrant to contact a church-approved monitor prior to arriving at the church to arrange a meeting time and place. The meeting place must be outside of all church buildings.
4. The registrant must agree to abide by any additional restrictions as determined by the pastor and the Safe Sanctuary Team.
5. A signed agreement between the registrant and the pastor detailing these additional restrictions shall be kept on file. The contents of the agreement shall be made known to the Safe Sanctuary Team, church leaders, volunteers that work with children and youth, and others as deemed appropriate by the Safe Sanctuary Team.

VI. Supervision:

A. General Principle: The primary purpose of the guidelines in this section is to establish and to provide basic procedures for safe ministry for children and youth. The first premise is to avoid any “one-on-one” situation of a child or youth with an adult (immediate family excluded).

B. General Guidelines:

1. The preferred situation for any church related child or youth activity is to have two adults who are not related present.
2. If it is not possible to have two unrelated adults present, then related adults may supervise children and youth.
3. When it is not possible to have two adults present, there should be one adult with at least two children or youth to avoid a one- on-one situation.
4. In situations where one-on-one is unavoidable, parents should be made aware and give their permission whenever possible.
5. When none of the above is possible, the adult leader will make other adults at the event aware of the situation.
6. No person shall supervise an age group of children or youth unless he or she is at least 18 years of age or older and are five years older than children or youth being supervised.
7. Eligible drivers are not required to be five years older than children and youth to be transported.
8. Activities shall be conducted in areas that eliminate the opportunity for secrecy and isolation. All rooms used in ministry for children or youth should have doors with windows; otherwise doors shall be left open.
9. Profane language, practical jokes that would be harmful or have sexual undertones, inappropriate comments, suggestive language or behavior will not be tolerated.

C. Specific situations:

1. Two adults should be present when assisting a child or youth in the bathroom.
2. Overnight events:
 - a) All children and youth must have a signed permission slip and medical form to attend the event if the event is off the church campus.
 - b) No girls in a boy’s room or boys in a girl’s room except for an adult supervised group activity. When individual rooms are not used, girls and boys may sleep in the same space as long as chaperones are present at all times.
 - c) For activities for children and youth that involve both males and females, there should be a minimum of one male and one female adult leader.
 - d) It is recommended that a first aid kit be taken on all overnight events.

3. Outside organizations that provide services for children or youth and use our facility, will be provided a copy of this policy by the approving authority and sign that they have read and will abide by it.

4. At any counseling session with children or youth, the door of the room used should remain open. If at all possible, the counseling session should take place when others are around but not within listening distance.

5. Photographs of children and youth may only be published for outside use by the church with written permission of the parents or guardians.

D. Transportation for children and youth:

1. Any person driving children and youth will ensure that the vehicle is in safe working order, that the vehicle is properly insured, that the driver is properly licensed, and that the driver will adhere to the applicable motor vehicle laws.

2. Prior to leaving for the event, all drivers will have completed and signed the driver form.

3. It is recommended that there be at least one mobile phone in each vehicle. The drivers should have a list of all phone numbers for all other chaperones.

4. Refer to section II.C for the hierarchy of driving preferences and section IV.B for general supervision guidelines.

VII. Intervention, Reporting, Investigating, Follow up

A. Intervention:

1. The child or youth's safety and well-being are paramount foremost before any reporting.

2. Where an imminent threat of continued or additional abuse exists, anyone with knowledge or information about such abuse shall immediately contact another adult and take steps to ensure the safety of the child or youth.

3. Any needed emergency healthcare shall be provided, such as (1) first aid, (2) emergency services, and/or (3) transport to a hospital emergency room.

4. The alleged victim shall be immediately removed from contact with the person being accused.

5. All persons involved will be treated with dignity and discretion within these procedures.

6. All records relating to the matter will be maintained in confidential files.

7. All efforts in handling the situation will be carefully documented.

B. Reporting:

1. Every allegation will be taken seriously.
2. Any alleged inappropriate behavior will be reported to the Pastor and the SST subject to the following conditions:
 - a) If the reporting person is uncomfortable with approaching the pastor, the reporting person should report to another member of the SST.
 - b) A member of the SST under any suspicion of involvement will be excluded from the proceedings.
 - c) A parent or guardian under any suspicion of involvement will be excluded from the proceedings.
3. Initial threat assessment will be assigned
 - a) Threat Level One - An accusation deemed as not likely or of minimal impact (e.g. one child threatening to "get" another child.)
 - b) Threat Level Two - A credible accusation from someone reporting inappropriate comments or touching from another.
 - c) Threat Level Three - An obvious and evident assault or other crime against a person.
4. Reporting and reaction will be based on the threat level and prudence
5. The threat level will be reassessed as facts become clear

C. Notification:

1. Threat Level One – May notify the following:
 - a) SST
 - b) Parents or Guardians
2. Threat Level Two – Notify the following:
 - a) SST b) Parents or Guardians
 - c) May be notified in turn
 - i. Law Enforcement
 - ii. Social Services (Protective Services)
 - iii. District Superintendent
 - iv. Liability insurer
3. Threat Level Three – Notify the following:
 - a) 911

- b) SST
- c) Parents or Guardians
- d) Law Enforcement
- e) Social Services (Protective Services)
- f) District Superintendent
- g) Liability insurer

D. Investigation:

1. Every allegation will be taken seriously.
2. An in-depth investigation will be carried out by SST member(s) under the supervision of the Pastor or his/her designee, as well as by civil authorities if appropriate.
3. Determine the levels of abuse. It is preferable to Err on the side of caution in safeguarding the children
 - a) Obvious abuse of a physical nature - Threat Level Three
 - b) Suspected abuse of a minor by an adult - Threat Level Two or One
 - c) Suspected abuse of a minor by a minor - Threat Level Two or One
 - d) Suspected abuse of an innuendo nature - Threat Level Two or One
 - e) Suspected abuse of an incidental nature – Threat Level Two or One
4. All investigation conversations shall be documented and held confidential to a “Need to know” level. Careful and confidential documentation is essential. The documentation should include the following:
 - a) The name of the leader observing or receiving the disclosure of alleged abuse, including the date, time, place, and any action taken by this person.
 - b) The alleged victim’s name, age, and date of birth.
 - c) Any statement made by the alleged victim.
 - d) Name of the person(s) being accused, the date, time and place of any conversation or any statement made by the person(s) being accused.
 - e) Any action taken, i.e. suspension of the person(s) being accused.
 - f) Date and time of call to the appropriate agency, name of worker spoken to, content of that conversation and case number assigned.
 - g) Date and time of call to law enforcement agency, name of officer spoken to, content of that conversation, and any tracking numbers.
 - h) Date and time of any other contacts made regarding this incident.

E. Corrective Action: The following suggested responses should be considered based on the results of the investigation by the SST.

1. Threat Level One

- a) As deemed appropriate by the SST member handling the situation
 - i. Friendly warning
 - ii. Counseling
 - iii. May include suspension during investigation
- b) A Report entered in the confidential files
 - i. As outlined in Section V.D
 - ii. All actions taken
- c) Review at the SST meeting

2. Threat Level Two

- a) Remove the implicated people from the situation
- b) All of the actions described by Threat Level One
- c) Letter to the offender
- d) Charges/Complaint
- e) Court Order (Restraint)

3. Threat Level Three

- a) Call 911
- b) All of the actions described by Threat Level Two

F. Media:

1. The Pastor or his/her designee will be the sole spokesperson for the church insofar as media inquiries are concerned.

2. Guidelines for Spokesperson:

- a) Be prepared.
- b) Be candid and honest.
- c) Be clear, concise and in context.
- d) Do not ask for quote review.
- e) Do respond to calls and questions quickly.

f) When an answer is unknown, simply state, "I don't know, but I'll do my best to find out the information for you."

g) Avoid saying "No comment."

VIII. Consequences for Failure to Comply with Safe Sanctuary

Should a leader of programs for children or youth deliberately choose to ignore the Safe Sanctuary Policy, the following escalating steps shall be taken as required:

- A. The pastor and/or a member of the Safe Sanctuary Team will discuss the matter with the leader.
- B. If the leader is paid staff, the matter will go before SPRC.
- C. The matter will go before Church Council.
- D. The leader will be removed from his or her position until the leader is compliant with Safe Sanctuary.

IX. Policy Review

- A. This policy is meant to be a living document and thus can be amended at any time with the approval of the Church Council.
- B. SST is responsible for reviewing the Safe Sanctuary Policy.
- C. Safe Sanctuary Policy will be reviewed annually or as needed.
- D. Recommended changes will be presented at the Church Council for adoption.
- E. SST may make editorial changes for grammatical clarification that do not change the intent of the policy without approval of the Church Council.

Implementation:

Milestones Estimated Date of Completion

- A. Identify SST
- B. Procure/identify locking File cabinet
- C. Compile list for background checks and prioritize
- D. Post policy on the web and in prominent places in the church and made available in church office.
- E. SST Plan education for congregation and orientation for new Members/volunteers.