



*“With God’s help we will so order our lives after the example of Christ,
that this child, surrounded by steadfast love, may be established in faith,
and confirmed and strengthened in the way that leads to life eternal.”*

United Methodist Hymnal, Church Baptismal Vows

In April 1996, the General Conference of the United Methodist Church adopted a resolution aimed at reducing the risks to children in the church. In addition, in 2006 our insurance carrier put further guidelines upon workers in the area of children’s and youth ministries. In response, UMCTO has created the following Safe Sanctuaries Policy to ensure that our church campus is a holy place of safety and sanctuary and a loving community of faith in which children can enjoy the wonderful freedom, serious joy, and fullness that God has bestowed upon us. We believe these measures are reasonable and prudent. They ensure protection of our children by appointing qualified employees and volunteers to educate and care for our children and youth.

I. SAFE SANCTUARIES POLICY STATEMENT

UMCTO’s purpose for establishing a Child Abuse Prevention Policy is to establish our unwavering commitment to the physical safety and spiritual growth for children and youth.

- UMCTO categorically opposes any form of child abuse. Further, we proactively engage in efforts to protect children and youth in our care to assure that this church and its activities are places of safety and nurture.
- Children are gifts from God to the entire Christian community. Therefore, when a child suffers, the entire community suffers. When Jesus invited the children to “come to me,” (Matt. 9:14) He was indicating that they, the most vulnerable, should be protected.
- Child abuse is both a violation of Christian hospitality and illegal. The State of California has definitions of child abuse that are applicable to every venue of church activity.

A. DEFINITIONS

1. **Child/Youth**: a person under the age of eighteen (18) years.
2. **Vulnerable adult**: a person over the age of eighteen (18) who has physical or mental limitations that restrict his or her ability to carry out normal activities or to protect his or her rights including, but not limited to, persons who have physical or developmental disabilities or whose physical or mental abilities have diminished because of age.
3. **Child Abuse**: includes physical, emotional, or sexual maltreatment of a child.
4. **Physical Abuse**: includes deliberately and intentionally causing bodily harm. Examples may include slapping, striking, hitting, spanking, violent battery with a weapon (knife, belt, strap, etc.), burning, shaking, kicking, choking, fracturing bones, and any of a wide variety of non-accidental injuries.
5. **Emotional Abuse**: includes intentional or reckless behaviors such as:
 - Exposing a child/youth to intimidation, humiliation, threats or bullying.
 - Infliction of emotional cruelty such as sending a message to the child/youth of worthlessness, badness, and being not only unloved, but undeserving of love and care.

6. **Sexual Abuse:** Abuse in which contact between a child/youth and an adult (or other older and more powerful child/youth) occurs. Sexual abuse includes behavior that communicates sexual interest and/or content including but not limited to the following:

- Displaying sexually suggestive material.
- Making inappropriate sexual comments or innuendoes about one's own or another person's body.
- Touching another person's body, hair, or clothing in a manner that can reasonably be understood as provocative or uncomfortable or overly intimate.
- Touching or rubbing oneself sexually in the presence of another person.
- Sexual contact including intercourse or oral sex.

7. **Activity:** church sponsored or supervised class, field trip, or event involving children/youth where the children's parents or legal guardians have given consent to participate but are not present.

B. ROLES & RESPONSIBILITIES

1. **Administrator(s):** Responsible for administering the consistent recruiting procedures for both staff and volunteer positions including compliance with the Safe Sanctuaries Policy.

2. **Pastor:** Responsible to make sure the church is in compliance with district, conference, and denominational guidelines. Pastor will be aware of background and reference reports and be a part of the discerning and deciding process if any questionable matters should arrive. Also needs to be noted that pastors **are** mandatory reporters of child abuse and neglect.

3. **Safe Sanctuaries Committee:** Responsible for the written policy and evaluates compliance through annual audits of the program. The committee is also responsible for preparing reports and providing information to organizations within the church as needed.

NOTE: Members of the committee may **NOT** be related to other committee members, staff or to the accused or accuser.

Committee is to consist of:

- Pastor(s)
- Administrator(s)
- Children's Director
- Youth Director
- Representative from SPRC
- Representative from Trustees

4. **Parents/Guardians:** Responsible for completing necessary forms on their children/youth, checking their children in and out of Sunday school and church activities, and making themselves aware of all mailings and materials sent to them by the church.

II. RECRUITING & SCREENING PROCESS

A. DEFINITIONS

1. **Consumer Reporting Agency of choice:** Accurate Background, Lake Forest, CA or other service as determined by the Safe Sanctuaries Committee.

2. **Background Check:** A report obtained through a consumer reporting agency which outlines findings in the following areas:

- Social Security Search
- County Criminal Search
- California Sex Offender Search
- National Criminal Database Search

NOTE: A Background Check does **NOT** include access to financial records of any kind.

3. **Applicant:** Any person completing an application for a staff position at UMCTO.

4. **Volunteer:** Any adult interested in donating his/her time and service to a program at UMCTO where he/she will **regularly** interact with children.

5. **Short-term Volunteer:** Any adult interested in donating his/her time and service to a program at UMCTO where he/she will **infrequently** interact with children (i.e. Vacation Bible School, or any other one time/once a year event). Short-term volunteers **may** work without a background check, but will **NOT** be left alone with minors.

6. **Youth Assistant:** A youth in 6th-12th grade that is interested in donating his/her time and service to a program at UMCTO. They may or may not regularly interact with children.

B. PROCESS OVERVIEW

All applicants and prospective volunteers are to participate in the Recruiting and Screening process as outlined below:

	Applicant	Long-term Volunteer	Short-term Volunteer	Youth Assistant
Have at least a six (6) month relationship w/UMCTO	N/A	X	N/A	N/A
Complete and return the following: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • UMCTO Staff or Volunteer Application • Background Check Release and Disclosure Form • Safe Sanctuaries Policy Statement 	X	X	X	X
Interview	X (Formal)	X (Informal)	X (Informal)	X (Informal)
Verification of References	X	X	N/A	N/A
Submit to Background Check	X	X	N/A	N/A
Read and sign the Safe Sanctuaries Policy Statement	X	X	X	X
Complete Initial Safe Sanctuaries Training Program	X	X	N/A	N/A
Participate in Annual Safe Sanctuaries Training	X	X	N/A	N/A

C. APPLICANT/ VOLUNTEER PACKET

1. The Application Packet is available from the UMCTO church office and will be given to all interested applicants and prospective volunteers.

2. The completed packet must be returned to UMCTO to indicate interest in a position (either staff or volunteer). This step begins the Recruiting & Screening process.

3. The Application Packet includes the following documents:

- Instructions for completion
- Staff/Volunteer Application
- Background Check Release Form Disclosure & Consent
- Summary of Rights under the Fair Credit and Reporting Act (FCRA)
- Safe Sanctuaries Policy & Procedures Statement
- Signature Acknowledging Safe Sanctuaries Policy & Procedures Statement
- "All About Me!" Form

4. The application form and attachments are to be treated confidentially, as they contain sensitive information. The distribution/use of this information is to be strictly controlled on a "need to know" basis. Forms are to be kept in a locked file cabinet with access restricted to Administrator(s) and Pastor(s). Forms will be kept for a *minimum of 10 years* from the year a volunteer becomes inactive or a staff member leaves UMCTO and will be shredded after that.

D. VERIFICATION OF REFERENCES

1. To further consider an applicant/volunteer, references listed on the application are to be contacted. A *minimum* of two (2) references are required. References must **NOT** be family **OR** staff members of UMCTO and preference is to those who can attest to one's work with children and/or youth. In addition, references for adult volunteers must have known applicant for at *least* five years and youth volunteers for at *least* three years.
2. The "Reference Check Form" is to be completed, documenting relevant information and is to be retained with the application and attachments.

E. BACKGROUND CHECK AND EVALUATION

1. To further consider an applicant/volunteer, a background check is to be done. To do so, the Background Check Release and Disclosure Form must be completed in full.
2. Timing of the background check is to be as follows:
 - **Applicants:** once the final candidate is identified, yet prior to a formal offer of employment.
 - **Volunteer:** prior to the appointment as a volunteer.
3. The process steps outlined by the Consumer Reporting Agency of choice are to be followed.
4. Once complete, the results of the background check are to be reviewed and assessed by the Administrator(s), consulting with the Senior Pastor as necessary.
 - If the background check provides **NO negative results**, convictions, or conflicting information it is to be designated as "clear" and the Recruiting and Screening process may progress.
 - If the background check returns **negative results**, convictions, or conflicting information, the Pastor(s) on staff will determine whether or not to move forward with the Recruiting and Screening process.

The evaluation process shall consider the following factors:

- a) The age of the conviction and the circumstances surrounding it.
- b) The nature and seriousness of the conviction.
- c) The age of the individual when the crime was committed and the time that has elapsed since the person's last criminal activity.
- d) The likelihood that the individual has continued the type of behavior leading to the crime.
- e) The relationship of the crime to the purpose of the church.
- f) The individual's demonstrated commitment to rehabilitation.
- g) Disclosure of information on the application form.

5. If the decision is made **not** to move forward with an offer of employment or appointing a volunteer, based on information within the background check, the formal notification process that complies with the Fair Credit and Reporting Act (FCRA) is to be followed:

- Pastor, or appropriate hiring entity, may verbally notify the individual as appropriate.
- The **Pre-Adverse Action notification** (letter, copy of the background check, summary of rights under the FCRA) is to be sent to the individual.
- Three (3) days later the **Adverse Action Letter** is to be sent.

6. Information gained during the background check process is to be handled with the highest levels of sensitivity. All precautions to maintain confidentiality are to be taken.

III. SUPERVISION

Supervision is **vital** to providing a safe and secure environment where children can experience the nurturing love of a church committed to modeling Christian faith. To ensure this, it is the responsibility of Pastor(s) on staff, or designee, to see that the following guidelines are observed.

A. DEFINITIONS

1. Typically some of the positions with supervisory responsibilities are:

Clergy	Children's Director
Youth Director	Director of Music Ministries
Children's Choir Director	Liturgical Dance Director
Youth Counselor/Youth Mentor	Event Chaperone
Confirmation Mentor	Sunday School Teacher
Teaching Assistant	Nursery Worker
Vacation Bible School Staff	Childcare Worker

2. **Lead Adult:** The adult that is appointed as being responsible for an activity.

NOTE: A youth that is eighteen (18) years old is **NOT** considered to be an adult until **AFTER** they have left high school.

3. **Youth Helper/Assistant:** Anyone who is assisting a teacher in 6th-12th grades.

B. GUIDELINES

All activities should be appropriately staffed to ensure the safety of **all** participants. To accomplish this, the following guidelines have been established:

1. Event Supervision

- All activities will have **at least** one (1) background checked adult. The lead adult is responsible for supervising any assistants, including youth helpers.
- **At least** two (2) adults should be present and involved in all activities, one (1) of which **must** be background checked. When it is not feasible to have two (2) adults, visual observation of the activity should be unobstructed and include periodic observation or visitation of the class or activity by a supervising adult.
- Related adults **may** work together, but a third (3rd) **non-related** adult must be present.
- A ratio of **1 adult to 8** Preschool and Elementary aged children or youth is not to be exceeded.
- A ratio of **1 adult to 3** infants and toddlers is not to be exceeded.
- Adults should be five (5) years older than the oldest participants. When this is not possible, there must be at least one (1) adult present that is five (5) years older.

2. Counseling and Mentoring

There are times when it may be appropriate for an adult to meet with a youth on an individual basis without other adults or youth present. In these circumstances, the clergy, counselor or mentor should adhere to the following guidelines:

- "Open Door" Policy, with door left open or meeting in a room with a window in the door.
- **At least** one (1) other adult is to be present on church campus and aware of meeting.
- Where practical, the meeting should take place in a public location or in a visibly observable location.

3. Contact with Children and Youth Outside of Church and Church Sponsored Events

No matter where or how communication occurs with a minor and whether it is connected with church or not, **Safe Sanctuaries rules apply**. This **includes**, but is not limited to e-mails, texting, phone calls, social media sites and written notes.

- **ALL** communications and contact outside of church or church sponsored activities should be **initiated** by the child/youth. **Including**, but not limited to requests to be "friends," for cell numbers, e-mails, usernames, etc.
- If the child is **under the age of thirteen (13)**, permission from their parents/guardians **must** be obtained **first** before engaging in **ANY** communication.
- UMCTO's *Photography Consent Form* states "that no minor will be identified by name on **ANY** photograph published on the internet or in other publications or documents distributed outside the church."

- Photos or videos of children and youth whether on cameras, camcorders, cell phones, etc. should only be taken if their parents have a signed UMCTO *Photography Consent Form* on file.
- Permission to post an image or video of a minor participating in an event connected with UMCTO to **ANY** electronic or social media site should be obtained from their parent/guardian **BEFORE** posting.
- Exposing minors to graphic or abusive images, language or other inappropriate content whether from the volunteer themselves or from those connected with your social media accounts is **inappropriate**.

4. Physical Boundaries

- No female adult is to hold a child over the age of five (5) years of age on their lap.
- No male adult should hold a child of **ANY** age on their lap.
- No adult is to be alone with a child, youth or another adult in a single stall bathroom (i.e. restrooms near Youth Rooms and Room 14). No youth is to be alone with a child or another youth, nor should children be alone with other children in a single stall bathroom.
- No adult is to be inside a stall within a multi-stall restroom (i.e. restrooms in office Narthex and Choir Building) with a child, youth or another adult with the door closed. If a child requires special assistance because of handicap, clothing, wiping, accident, etc. let **at least** one (1) other adult know what you are doing and where you will be. Whenever possible use the buddy system with another adult, child or youth present.
- Changing diapers **is** appropriate, unless you have been instructed **NOT** to do so. Diapers should be changed in an **open** environment and all health precautions should be followed (i.e. hand washing and disposing properly of changing materials).
- No adult is to **initiate** a hug with a child or youth.
- No youth helper is to **initiate** a hug with a child.

5. Transportation

- No adult is to be alone in a car with a youth or child.
- Permission to transport children/youth to and from church activities by volunteers should be **initiated** by parents/guardians.
- To transport children/youth a driver must be **at least** twenty-five (25) years of age and must have a current *Driver Form*, a copy of current license and a copy of current insurance on file
- Drivers are responsible for letting the Safe Sanctuaries Administrator(s), the Youth Director or Pastor know if their license becomes suspended or revoked, if they receive a ticket for a driving offense or if their auto insurance lapses.

NOTE: Tickets for minor offenses do not automatically disqualify a worker from future driving.

6. Off-Campus/Overnight Events

- Males & females **MUST** have separate sleeping areas. At **NO** time shall an adult share a bed, sleeping bag, blanket or pillow with a child/youth.
- Males & females **MUST** bathe in separate areas **or** at different times. At **NO** time should an adult bathe with children/youth.
- If a group splits up, there should be **at least** one (1) adult accompanying **each** group. **NO** child/youth should be allowed to go off on their own **or** with a group of other children/youth, even if one of them is a youth who is eighteen (18) years old.

****Failure to follow these rules will be cause for review by Administrator(s), Pastor(s) and/or Safe Sanctuaries Committee, with the possibility of dismissal from program.****

IV. REPORTING & PLAN OF RESPONSE TO AN ALLEGATION OF ABUSE

UMCTO is committed to a safe environment for its children and youth. To honor that commitment the church shall abide by the following process of faithfully reporting and responding to an alleged abuse, cooperating fully with investigative and law enforcement agencies, maintaining the confidentiality of those involved and providing appropriate pastoral care for those involved.

A. DEFINITIONS

1. **California Law (P.C. 11165)**: defines the requirements for mandatory and non-mandatory reporters of child abuse. UMCTO shall instruct staff and volunteers to report suspected child abuse to necessary staff member and pastor. (Clergy members and employees of a licensed child day care facility are examples of mandated reporters who are required by law to report incidents of child abuse.)
2. **Mandated Reporter**: A person who is mandated by law to report child abuse because of their position with an organization that cares for children. These persons include child-care custodians and clergy members.
 - a) **Child-care Custodian**: Specific examples are an administrator or employee of a public or private youth center, youth recreation program or youth organization; an administrator or employee of a public or private organization whose duties require direct contact and supervision of children; an employee of a licensed community care or child day care facility.
 - b) **Clergy Member**: Specific examples are a priest, minister, rabbi, or religious practitioner.
3. **Non-mandated Reporter**: All other persons associated with children that do not meet the criteria of a childcare custodian or clergy.

B. DOCUMENTATION

1. The Safe Sanctuaries Committee shall maintain a dated, comprehensive record of all persons involved in the incident and the steps taken by the church to report and respond to the abuse allegation.
2. One or both of the following forms shall be included in the initial reporting of a suspected or alleged incident of abuse:

- UMCTO's Report of Suspected Incident of Child/Youth Abuse
- Child Abuse Report (SS 8572)

3. Written records of the actions taken shall be maintained throughout the process. All documentation about an alleged incident shall be filed in a confidential file drawer, located in a designated office. Access to this file shall be limited to the administrator, pastor(s) on staff and church designated legal counsel. As staff, pastoral and legal counsel interactions continue with the victim, the victim's family, and the alleged abuser, written documentation shall be kept confidential and maintained in an appropriate file.

C. PROCESS

UMCTO is committed to a safe environment for its children and youth. To honor that commitment the church shall abide by the following process of faithfully reporting and responding to an alleged abuse, cooperating fully with investigative and law enforcement agencies, maintaining the confidentiality of those involved and providing appropriate pastoral care for those involved.

1. If a report of alleged abuse is made:

An individual notifies a staff or volunteer person of the church that they, a person related to them, or a person they have observed has experienced one or more forms of abuse. The abuse may have been by a staff person or volunteer of the church, by a family member, or by an individual other than a family member. It is imperative that this initial contact person understands the high level of confidentiality and delicacy the situation demands and be instructed as such.

a) Role of the **Non-mandated Reporter:**

- Immediately notify one of the pastors on staff, giving all details of the allegation. If the allegations implicate the pastor, notify one of the members of the Staff/Parish Relations Committee (SPRC).
- Remain present until authorities are called and the written report is complete.
- Be available to meet with authorities, as needed.

b) Role of the **Mandated Reporter (Child Care Custodians):**

- Immediately notify one of the pastors on staff, giving all details of the allegation. If the allegations implicate the pastor, notify one of the members of the Staff/Parish Relations Committee (SPRC).
- Remain present until authorities are called and the written report is complete.
- Be available to meet with authorities, as needed.

c) Role of the **Mandated Reporter (Senior/Associate/Assistant Pastor, Other Clergy):**

- Listens to the allegation, taking notes as appropriate, and writes an initial report.
- Determines to whom this person has spoken about the situation.
- Once it is determined that the allegation is probable, the Mandated Reporter shall report the incident to the proper authority immediately.

2. Mandated Reporter reports incident to proper authority **immediately**

a) If the alleged abuse involved a pastor, staff person or volunteer:

- Call the Thousand Oaks Police Department 805-494-8200. Explain the incident. If they determine that the incident is well-founded, they will send an investigator to the church.
 - Cooperate fully with any investigation conducted by the law enforcement or child protective services officials.
 - Immediate action shall be taken to remove the alleged offender from their position in order to protect the child(ren) or youth, while being sensitive to the need for maintaining confidentiality. Treat the individual with dignity and without anger or hostility, maintaining a calm, factual approach.
 - Notify the parents of the allegation. If the child is still on campus, do whatever is necessary to assure the child's safety and comfort until the parent(s) arrive. The safety of the victim is the church's primary concern.
 - Complete the Suspected Child Abuse Report, Form SS 8572.
 - The Safe Sanctuaries Committee shall be notified of the alleged incident and at the same time be made fully aware of the absolute necessity that the confidentiality of the victim and alleged abuser be protected.
- b) If the alleged abuse involved a family member:
- Call the Child Abuse Registry (714-940-1000). Explain the incident. If they determine that the incident is well-founded, they will send an investigator to the church. Cooperate fully with any investigation conducted by the law enforcement or child protective services officials.
 - Complete the Suspected Child Abuse Report, Form SS 8572.
 - The Safe Sanctuaries Committee shall be notified of the alleged incident and at the same time be made fully aware of the absolute necessity that the confidentiality of the victim and alleged abuser be protected.
- c) If the alleged abuse involved a non-family member (non-staff person or volunteer):
- Call the Thousand Oaks Police Department 805-494-8200. Explain the incident. If they determine that the incident is well-founded, they will send an investigator to the church. Cooperate fully with any investigation conducted by the law enforcement or child protective services officials.
 - Notify the parents of the allegation. If the child is still on campus, do whatever is necessary to assure the child's safety and comfort until the parent(s) arrive. The safety of the victim is the church's primary concern.
 - Complete the Suspected Child Abuse Report, Form SS 8572.

- The Safe Sanctuaries Committee shall be notified of the alleged incident and at the same time be made fully aware of the absolute necessity that the confidentiality of the victim and alleged abuser be protected.

3. Identify a spokesperson:

The Safe Sanctuaries Committee will identify a single person to speak for the church concerning the alleged child abuse incident. The spokesperson chosen should be capable of speaking calmly and thoughtfully in the glare of cameras and in front of microphones.

- a) Seek the advice of legal counsel before responding to media inquiries or releasing information to the congregation.
- b) The designated spokesperson shall be the only person authorized to speak to the media on behalf of the congregation if a statement or response to the news media is deemed necessary.
- c) The spokesperson's statement shall include:
 1. The church's policy for the prevention of child abuse.
 2. The church's concern for the safety of the victim and **ALL** children and youth.
- d) The spokesperson should never make any statements indicating that the church failed to take this allegation seriously.
- e) The spokesperson shall prepare a brief and honest statement that can be made to the congregation at a time deemed appropriate by the Safe Sanctuaries Committee.
- f) The following persons or entities shall be notified and at the same time be made fully aware of the absolute necessity that the confidentiality of the victim and alleged abuser be protected. These persons or entities will be kept aware of the church's actions throughout the process up to and including resolution:
 - Annual Conference authorities (District Superintendent and Office of the Bishop)
 - Insurance Agent
- g) As determined by the Safe Sanctuaries Committee, the following persons may need to be notified of the incident:
 - Church's spokesperson
 - Chair, Trustees Committee
 - Chair, Staff Parish Relations Committee (if alleged abuser is staff member)
 - Others as appropriate

4. The church's relationship with the victim and family:

Pastor(s) on staff shall be proactive in care for those involved in an incident of child or youth abuse. If the pastor is suspected of the abuse the CAL-PAC Conference will assign an alternate pastor to minister. Care is including, but not limited to, the following:

- Victim
- Family members of victim
- Co-workers

5. **The church's relationship with the alleged abuser:**

- Acknowledge that he or she is a person of sacred worth.
- Provide access to resources for counseling.
- Remove the alleged abuser from his or her position as a worker with children and youth until the allegations are fully investigated and the allegations resolved or dismissed.
- The senior pastor or designee shall determine the appropriate future relationship with the accused and shall take into consideration the needs of the alleged victim as well as the accused. If the pastor is suspected of the abuse the Bishop will appoint a designee to do the same.

V. **ANNUAL TRAINING & REVIEW**

Purpose: To reinforce the Safe Sanctuaries program and provide a review of the policy and procedures. Communicate updates and changes to continuing volunteers and staff.

1. **Group Meeting**

- Sessions are to be offered as needed but **at least** once per year. Volunteers are to attend on an annual basis. If necessary, classes will be offered several times in order for all staff and volunteers to attend at least once a year.
- Sessions are open to anyone from the congregation, however, targeted to current staff and volunteers. Publicity and invitations are needed to make available to parents and congregation.
- The orientation/training session should be held at UMCTO at a time that is conducive to most persons attending. Smaller orientation meetings will be scheduled for those who could not attend the main one.
- The orientation will be led by a designated member(s) of the Safe Sanctuaries Committee and/or Administrator(s) and/or the Pastor(s) and/or Staff Member(s) responsible for Children and Youth Discipleship. Other resource persons will be included in the orientation as appropriate.
- A document acknowledging participation is to be signed by each person, indicating his/her ongoing commitment to support the Safe Sanctuaries Policy.

2. **Content:**

A specific agenda and course materials are to be used by the trainer in a consistent manner.

Topics to be included but not limited to:

- Education regarding the nature of child abuse and its consequences.
- Education regarding the prevention of child abuse.
- Review of the Safe Sanctuaries Policy.
- Overview of the Reporting and Response Procedure.
- Orientation to the selection and screening process guidelines.
- Review of space use, classroom and playground safety, cleanliness, health codes, and other related matters.

3. **Proof of Compliance:**

Documentation, including copies of letters, announcements, and training agendas shall be maintained as proof of compliance.