

St. Thomas UMC / 8899 Sudley Road / Manassas, VA 20110

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Child Protection Policy 2021

*Our Mission: We exist to reach, nourish, and
serve the community so all may experience
healing and new life in Jesus Christ.*

Safe Sanctuary Training Renewal Due:_____

1. Purpose

The goal of St. Thomas United Methodist Church (STUMC) children and youth ministries is to provide, with God's help, a solid foundation of Biblical truth which will instill in our young people a respect and love for Christ and His church. The purpose of this policy is to ensure that we accomplish our goal in such a way that, first, parents can be confident that STUMC's facilities and programs nurture their children and students in a caring and secure environment; second, their children and students can see God's loving guidance and care personified, and finally, that the adults working in children and student ministries are protected from any situation that might lead to false accusations of misconduct.

2. Biblical Foundation

STUMC seeks to express God's love of children as taught by Jesus and provide for their personal wholeness, growth, and protection. The Bible is foundational to the understanding upon which our policies, procedures, and ministries must stand.

"Behold, children are a heritage from the LORD..." Psalm 127:3a

"At that time, the disciples came to Jesus, saying, "Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven? And calling to him a child, he put him in the midst of them and said, "Truly, I say to you, unless you turn and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. Whoever humbles himself like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. Whoever receives one such child in my name receives me, but whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, it would be better for him to have a great millstone fastened around his neck and to be drowned in the depth of the sea." Matthew 18:1-6

Our response to this Biblical mandate is to ensure that we maintain a safe, secure, and loving place where caregivers, teachers, and leaders, in the solemn knowledge of their responsibility, minister appropriately to the needs of the children and students. We look to demonstrate Christ's love by surrounding the children and students of our church with such security and care that they see the reflection of His arms around them. Our responsibility is to provide this environment so that our children may both grow and grow nearer to God.

3. *Definitions of Child Abuse*

LEGAL DEFINITION: Child abuse is defined as per the legal definition contained in Section 3, Virginia's Child Abuse Laws. Virginia's Child Abuse Laws can be found at the end of this packet.

TYPES OF ABUSE:

- A **Physical Abuse:** Physical abuse is defined as the use of physical force that may result in bodily injury, physical pain, or impairment. This type of force is not an accident. It can include, but is not limited to:
- a. Assault (hitting, beating, shoving, etc.)
 - b. Shaking or slapping
 - c. Burning or scalding
 - d. Kicking or choking
- B. **Psychological (Mental or Emotional) Abuse:** Psychological abuse is characterized by a person subjecting, or exposing, another person to behavior that may result in psychological trauma. It does not always involve injuries we can see. It can include, but is not limited to:
- a. Close confinement, such as being shut in a closet
 - b. Inadequate nurture or the withholding of affection
 - c. Excessive punishment or extreme discipline
 - d. Knowingly permitting such behavior as drug or alcohol abuse
- C. **Neglect:** Neglect is not hearing or addressing (i.e. ignoring) a child's basic needs for health, welfare, or safety which results in harm to the child. It can include, but is not limited to, any of the following acts of negligence or maltreatment:
- a. Failure to provide adequate food, shelter, clothing
 - b. Abandonment
 - c. Refusal to seek treatment for illness
 - d. Inadequate supervision
 - e. Health hazards in the home, school, or church
 - f. Ignoring a child's needs for contact, affirmation, stimulation, and nurture
- D. **Sexual Abuse:** Sexual abuse involves an act of forcing undesired sexual behavior by one person upon another. When that force is immediate, of short duration, or infrequent, it is called **sexual assault**. It can include, but it not limited to, any of the following exploitive behaviors:
- a. Inappropriate verbal stimulation
 - b. Fondling, incest, rape, sodomy
 - c. Exposing a child to pornography or adult sexual activity

4. *Responsibilities of STUMC*

ST. THOMAS: As a provider of childcare and Christian education, STUMC is responsible for the safety and well-being of the children and students in its care. We are responsible both to the parents of the children/students and to the legal authorities for ensuring that our facilities meet all standards of physical and emotional safety and due care.

As an employer of the childcare workers and as a group of caring volunteers, we are also responsible for ensuring that our staff, paid workers, and volunteers are protected from being in a situation where they may be falsely accused of inappropriate behavior toward any child or student in our care.

As a body of followers of Jesus Christ, we are responsible for providing: love, care, and support that reflects God's own, for Christian fellowship and education, and for loving outreach to all attendees- from oldest to youngest- of our worship services, activities, and programs.

Within our Christian mission, our policies are designed to provide protection to both the children/students and the workers by ensuring that no worker is ever placed into a position where they are alone with the children/student and that no worker uses violent or inappropriate discipline methods. With appropriate assistance and witnesses in place, no opportunity should ever arise for any worker to commit any act of abuse against our children and students.

STAFF: Our entire staff is required to know all responsibilities of STUMC toward its children/students and toward the workers. They shall be trained in our policies and procedures. Those members of staff and officers of the church constituting the local response team (see Section 6, Reporting Child Abuse) or directly supervising paid childcare workers shall attend church training in child protection; shall be cognizant of their responsibilities in the event of an allegation of child abuse; and shall be fully trained in the conduct of their related duties.

PAID WORKERS IN CHILDREN AND STUDENT MINISTRY AREAS: Our paid childcare and student workers are responsible for knowing both church policy and Virginia law regarding child abuse and protection. They must pass background checks and interviews, attend child protection training, and be prepared to document any incidents which may indicate the presence of abuse. They shall be required to read, understand, acknowledge, and sign this policy before beginning their duties at STUMC. They are

responsible for implementing and abiding by our written policies on child protection and classroom discipline.

VOLUNTEER WORKERS IN CHILDREN AND STUDENT MINISTRY AREAS: Our volunteer workers in children and student ministry areas are responsible for knowing these policies before being permitted to work with the children or students. They must pass background checks and attend a "Safe Sanctuary" course. We acknowledge that our volunteers are not childcare professionals and are not trained to recognize signs of abuse; however, our volunteers are responsible for remaining aware that the potential for abuse exists and that they are part of our efforts at prevention. They are responsible for abiding by our written policies on child protection and classroom discipline. Our volunteers are asked to prayerfully consider their calling to and behavior in the children and student ministry areas before participating in the work, so that no inappropriate behavior arises on their parts.

COMMUNITY GROUPS USING STUMC FACILITIES: Leaders/representatives of community groups desiring to use our facilities must read, acknowledge, and sign our Child Protection Policy before being permitted to use facilities belonging to STUMC. While using STUMC facilities, community groups must abide by the policies set forth in this document. All such groups will receive a copy of this document and shall file their completed acknowledgment form (Form A) with the Trustees of STUMC.

5. Ways We Protect Our Children/Students

To create the safest possible environment for children and students at STUMC, we will continue to follow all physical safety policies and will use several protection measures, as follows:

SIX MONTH RULE: STUMC requires that any volunteer church workers in children or student programs be members of the church for at least six months or be actively involved in the church for six months before beginning responsibilities. We make every effort to place new workers with longtime, experienced leadership volunteers. Paid workers, while not required to be members of STUMC, will always be supervised by senior staff members or experienced volunteer leaders.

WORKER SCREENING:

- A. PAID STAFF: Before beginning employment, paid childcare and student workers will be asked to sign Form A containing a statement that they have never been

convicted of an offense involving child abuse, neglect, moral turpitude, or any other offense defined in Virginia Code Section 63.2-1719, and that they have not been the subject of a founded complaint of child abuse or neglect. Anyone refusing to sign Form A will not be permitted to work with the children or students. In addition, applications for paid staff positions will undergo a criminal background check, and will not be hired if they have been convicted of an offense involving child abuse, neglect, moral turpitude, or any other offense defined in Virginia Code Section 63.2-1719, or if they have been the subject of a founded complaint of child abuse or neglect.

B. **VOLUNTEERS:** In order to ensure that we have the right people working in any area of the life of the church, all volunteers are asked to prayerfully consider their calling toward a given ministry before committing to such service. Before accepting their service, the church staff and church members also pray that they are the right people to do the work. In this way, we are assured that most of the volunteers working in children and student programs feel the LORD calling them to such a ministry and are prepared for and suited to the work.

Notwithstanding, all volunteer workers in programs that involve children and students shall read and sign Form A, complete a criminal background check, and comply with the Child Protection Policy as set forth by STUMC. Individuals who will be working with the children and students on a limited basis shall sign Form A containing a statement that they have never been convicted of an offense involving child abuse, neglect, moral turpitude, or any other offense defined in Virginia Code Section 63.2-1719, and that they have not been the subject of a founded complaint to child abuse or neglect. If an individual proposed for a position working with children or students is a known sexual or violent offender, the matter shall be brought to the pastor and the individual will NOT be assigned to work with children or students.

C. **CHILD PROTECTION TRAINING:** Before beginning their paid or volunteer service, workers with children and students will be required to read the church's Child Protection Policy and sign Form A indicating that they have read and understand the policy and agree to abide by it. Persons will not be permitted to serve until the policy has been read and the form signed. Periodically (no less than once a year and preferably more frequently), training sessions related to the Child Protection Policy will be offered. All paid childcare and student workers, church staff members, and individuals (whether paid or volunteer) directly supervising paid childcare workers will be required to attend at least one training session per year,

preferably before beginning their duties. Volunteer workers in children and student programs, SPRC, Sunbeam Children's Center Board, and members of the Board of Trustees will also be required to attend.

D. **ALLERGIES:** STUMC recognizes the serious health risks peanuts and other food allergens pose to those affected by them. Through proper hand washing, education, communication, and attention to labeled ingredients, we strive to minimize the risk of exposure to food allergens by those participating in church sponsored programs and activities. However, STUMC makes no claim to being a peanut or other food allergy free facility.

E. **ADULT SUPERVISION POLICIES:**

a. **Two Adult Rule:** Ideally, workers in our children and student programs shall not be alone with children at any time, for the protection of both the children/students and the workers. Workers must be at least five years older than the oldest participant in the program. This will be accomplished by implementing the following rules:

1. Teachers and leaders will be assigned in teams of two or more per classroom and for all church activities involving children and students. This is required for all church sponsored and community groups of children or students who use our church facility.
11. Volunteers in children and student programs must be at least five years older than the oldest participant in the program or activity. Nursery volunteers must be sixteen years of age or older.
111. In the event that a husband and wife serve in leadership together, a third non-family member will be present.
- 1v. In the event that it is not possible to have at least two adult workers in the room, there will be a security personnel roving the halls closely monitoring any classroom where only one adult is present. The same will apply to student programs. If there are groups meeting in separate physical locations and it is not possible to have at least two adults with each group, there will be an adult roving back and forth between groups to monitor.
- v. All programs falling under the Sunbeam Children's Center, including but not limited to the Day Care and Preschool will abide by Virginia licensing regulations in respect to the child-adult ratios.

b. **Supervision of Mixed Gender Groups:** When a group includes both boys and girls and if the group stays overnight at the church or leaves the church premises, both male and female leaders must be present.

- c. **Field Trip Policy:** All field trips under the auspices of STUMC are guided by the provisions of this Child Protection Policy. All field trips will be supervised by at least the minimum number of two adults in the vehicle as required by our policies. In addition, a signed parental consent form with an authorization for emergency medical care is required for all such trips. All drivers of automobiles transporting children or students shall be at least twenty-five years of age, covered by liability insurance, and must sign both a release allowing STUMC to run a DMV driving record check and Form A.
- d. **Girl and Boy Scouting:** These organizations meeting at STUMC will abide by their national organization policies, in addition to this policy.
- e. **Any new groups** that wish to meet at STUMC will abide by these procedures unless they meet and coordinate with the Local Church Response team to evaluate and approve special considerations.

F. **CLASSROOM DISCIPLINE POLICY:** The philosophy underlying classroom discipline at STUMC is that it is an opportunity to teach children and students the importance of self-respect and respect for others. Paul instructed that assemblies of Christ's church ought to be orderly and edifying (1 Corinthians 14:26-33). Therefore, in our church's family, disruptive behavior will not be permitted in our classrooms, nor will any child or student be treated with disrespect or undue harshness when requiring correction. The following guidelines will govern the disciplining of children and students in our classrooms:

- a. If a child/student is misbehaving, the adult will tell the child/student (in age appropriate terms) specifically what is not acceptable and indicate the expected behavior. Example: "We do not throw the blocks; we use the blocks for building." This is called identification.
- b. If identifying the misbehavior does not work, the child/ student will be guided to another activity. This is called redirection.
- c. If, after redirection, inappropriate behavior continues, the child or student will be placed at a table to work alone so that he/she is not affecting the other students. This is called separation.
- d. If the disruptive behavior continues after these steps have been taken, the child may be taken to the Director of Children and Student Ministries and left in their care. This is called removal. If removal becomes necessary, the child or student's parents will be informed and the situation discussed with them the same day.
- e. The leaders of off campus ministry involving children and students shall abide by this Child Protection Policy and shall sign applicable parts of Form A.

- f. At no time will physical punishment, verbal abuse, ridicule, or excessively harsh verbal reprimand be used with children or students in our care.
- G. CONSEQUENCES FOR POLICY VIOLATIONS: If any action is observed, not constituting abuse, but in violation of this Child Protection Policy, the following consequences will result. The choice of consequences will reflect the severity of the offense and whether such action is a repeated offense. A volunteer acting in such a manner may be:
- a. Taken aside by the volunteer or staff member in leadership and reminded of the disciplinary and child protection policies
 - b. Approached by the pastor and reminded of the disciplinary and child protection policies, and if necessary, counseled on appropriate anger management
 - c. Removed from his/her position with the children or student ministries and barred from participating in such ministries until he/she attends a Child Protection training session
 - d. Permanently barred from contact with children or student ministries.
 - e. A paid employee observed in the same actions will be addressed by STUMC Personnel Policy.
- H. OPEN CLASSROOM POLICY: Classrooms or childcare rooms may be visited, at any time, without prior notice by church staff, parents, or other volunteer church workers. Staff, parents, or volunteers visiting classrooms in which Sunday School, Bible study, or a rehearsal is in progress are only requested to avoid causing disruption to the students/participants. There are also glass windows in the doors to permit observation. The Director of Children and Student Ministries will conduct random periodic observations and inspections of childcare rooms and classrooms.

6. STUMC Policy: Reporting Child Abuse

There are two possible situations requiring immediate action on the part of STUMC, its members, staff, and volunteers. If there would be allegations of child abuse at STUMC, or if a child coming to STUMC exhibit signs of abuse occurring away from the STUMC setting, the procedures below shall be followed.

Due to the serious sensitive nature of such a crisis, and the potential harmful effects (both to the child/student and the accused) of false accusations and unrestrained gossip, **THE STRICTEST CONFIDENTIALITY** will be observed throughout the

reporting process. In order to minimize confusion and talk, anyone associated with STUMC children or student programs *who observes or has reason to suspect abuse* should report these observations *directly to the head of the relevant program* as follows:

Nursery: Director of Children's Ministries

Sunbeam Children's Center: Director of Sunbeam Children's Center or Assistant Director of Sunbeam Children's Center

All Other Children's Programs: Director of Children's Ministries

All Student Programs: Director of Student Ministries

The head of the relevant program is then responsible for ensuring that the Senior Pastor is informed of the allegations and that the procedures laid out below are set in motion.

Note that:

- a. If the supervisor or head of program is not available or
- b. If the supervisor or head of program is the accused

The observer is then responsible for directly contacting the Senior Pastor immediately. If the Senior Pastor is the accused, the Associate Minister should be contacted instead.

Specific procedures for reporting suspected child abuse follow, *keeping in mind that confidentiality for both the victim and accused are to be strictly observed at all times:*

- a. Treat any allegation of child abuse seriously; do not ignore the issue in the hope that it will go away. Any individual observing acts of abuse occurring at STUMC is required by law to report this. Any individual associated with STUMC's child and student programs is required by law to report suspected abuse if they observe in any child/student signs of abuse having occurred. Training sessions will include definitions of abusive acts and recognition of classic signs of abuse.
- b. There will be a Local Church Response Team responsible for managing the STUMC response to the situation. This team shall be comprised of the Senior Pastor, a representative of each of the following, to be designated by the chairperson of the respective committees: Board of Trustees, Church Council, and Staff Parish Relations. If one of the members of the team is the accused, an alternate will be selected to replace the individual involved. Any allegations of child abuse must be reported immediately to the Local Church Response Team.

- c. The Pastor and program head shall pray for all persons affected by the allegation, and for an atmosphere of healing in the church.
- d. The individual reporting the abuse shall document in writing by completing a confidential incident report form and the pastor/program head shall document all procedures observed in handling the allegation.
- e. The appropriate individual (primarily the Senior Pastor) will perform necessary notification as follows:
 - a. Call the Alexandria District Superintendent immediately. In accordance with the Virginia Annual Conference Policy on misconduct, the District Superintendent will then contact the Conference Response Team who will send a representative to STUMC as quickly as possible, preferably within twenty-four hours.
 - b. Notify the Virginia Department of Social Services: 800-552-7096, and/or the local police department of the allegation, as required by law.
 - c. Notify the parents of the alleged victim, and the parents of the alleged perpetrator, if a minor.
 - d. Notify the church's insurance company, particularly in the case of abuse allegedly occurring at STUMC.
 - e. Notify SPRC in cases of paid employees.
- f. Individuals involved in reporting or the Local Church Response Team should NOT confront the accused with the allegation. However, if the accused has assigned duties within the life of the church, that person must temporarily be relieved of his/her duties until the investigation is concluded.
- g. The Pastor should extend whatever care and resources necessary, but under no circumstances should the pastor or any church leader or member investigate the allegation. In providing care to the alleged victim and the accused, and their families, the pastor or church leader should under no circumstances be drawn into a discussion of truth or falsity of the allegation. Do not assign blame or take any steps that involve establishing or refuting the allegation.
- h. It is appropriate to show care, comfort, and reassurance for the alleged victim. This should be the pastoral objective from the moment the allegation is received.
 1. Observe confidentiality for both the alleged victim and the accused.

7. Policy Review

The Child Protection Policy of STUMC shall be reviewed annually by the STUMC Child Protection Task Force (defined as a representative from each of the following groups: Board of Trustees, Church Council, SPRC, and Education) and their findings shall be

reported to Church Council. If any additions or modifications to this policy are required, the Child Protection Task Force will draft any proposed amendments for adoption and vote on them. They will then submit them with their annual findings to the Trustees and Church Council. A verification follow-up report will be made each year at the Church Conference to ensure the integrity of the policy and procedures.

8. Policy Implementation

All programs of the church involving children or students will implement these policies. This policy does not take the place of or invalidate policies concerning additional physical safety procedures (fire safety and evacuation policy, playground safety policy, minimum adult supervision-to-student ratios policy, nursery cleaning/sterilizing policy, etc.) used in our children and student programs.

This policy is in effect immediately upon approval by the Church Council. All staff, paid childcare, or student program workers, and volunteers in the children or student programs, and all groups meeting in the church facilities will receive training, be given a copy of this policy and required to sign the policy Form A certifying that you have read and understood the policy and have received training.

Exceptions to this document at Haymarket Church will be approved on a case-by-case basis by the STUMC Church Council.

Virginia's Child Abuse Laws

Under Virginia law, Section 63.2-100, an abused or neglected child is defined as any child less than 18 years of age: 1. Whose parents or other person responsible for his care creates or inflicts, threatens to create or inflict, or allows to be created or inflicted upon such child a physical or mental injury other than accidental means, or creates a substantial risk of death, disfigurement, or impairment of bodily or mental functions. 2. Whose parents or other person responsible for his care neglects or refuses to provide care necessary for his health. However, no child who in good faith is under treatment solely by spiritual means through prayer in accordance with the tenets and practices of a recognized church or religious denomination shall for that reason alone be considered to be an abused or neglected child. 3. Whose parents or other person responsible for his care abandons such child. 4. Whose parents or other person responsible for his care commits or allows to be committed any act of sexual exploitation or any sexual act upon a child in violation of the law. 5. Who is without parental care or guardianship caused by the unreasonable absence or the mental or physical incapacity of the child's parent, guardian, legal custodian or other personal standing in loco parentis; or 6. Whose parents or other person responsible for his care creates a substantial risk of physical or mental injury by knowingly leaving the child alone in the same dwelling, including an apartment as defined in 55-79.2, with a person to whom the child is not related by blood or marriage and who the parent or other person responsible for his care knows has been convicted of an offense against a minor for which registration is required as a violent sexual offender pursuant to 9.1-902.

Section 63.2-1509 in Virginia law states that the following persons who, in their professional or official capacity, have reason to suspect that a child is an abused or neglected child, shall report the matter immediately to the local department of the country or city wherein the child resides or wherein the abuse or neglect is believed to have occurred or to the Department's toll-free child abuse and neglect hotline: 1. Any person licensed to practice medicine or any of the healing arts, 2. Any hospital resident or intern, and any person employed in the nursing profession, 3. Any person employed as a social worker, 4. Any probation officer, 5. Any teacher or other person employed in a public or private school, kindergarten, or nursery school, 6. Any person providing full-time or part-time child care for pay on a regularly planned basis, 7. Any mental health professional, 8. Any law-enforcement officer, 9. Any mediator eligible to receive court referrals pursuant to 8.01-576.8, 10. Any professional staff person, not previously enumerated, employed by a private or state-operated hospital, institution, or facility to which children have been committed or where children have been placed for care and

treatment, 11. Any person associated with or employed by any private organization responsible for the care, custody, or control of children, 12. Any person who is designated a court-appointed special advocate pursuant to Article 5 (9.1-151 et seq.) of Chapter 1 of Title 9.1, 13. Any person, over the age of eighteen years, who has received training approved by the Department of Social Services for the purpose of recognizing and reporting child abuse and neglect and, 14. Any person employed by a local department as defined in 63.2-100 who determines eligibility for public assistance.

Any person who makes a report or provides records or information or who testifies in any judicial proceeding arising from such report, records, or information shall be immune from any civil or criminal liability or administrative penalty or sanction on account of such report, records, information, or testimony, unless such person acted in bad faith or with malicious purpose.

In Manassas, if you have a concern that child is being abused or neglected, you may call the Department of Social Services at 703-361-8277 during office hours or the State Child Abuse/Neglect Hotline at 800-552-7096 to report your concerns twenty-four hours a day.