

CHILD, YOUTH & VULNERABLE ADULT SAFETY POLICY
MANDATORY STANDARDS FOR SIERRA VISTA UNITED METHODIST CHURCH
November, 2017

Reducing the Risk of Abuse in the Church

“Whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me” (Mark 9:37 NRSV).

“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 NRSV).

Call

In response to God’s call to care for the vulnerable, Sierra Vista United Methodist Church is committed to the well-being of every person entrusted to its care. This commitment is in harmony with the *Book of Resolutions* (§162 Social Principles) and the baptismal covenant (*United Methodist Hymnal*).

Purpose

As part of the Rio Texas Conference, Sierra Vista United Methodist Church is determined to provide an environment in which Participants (as defined herein) are safe from Neglect or Abuse. The scope of this policy and its provisions shall apply to all staff, volunteers, clergy, or lay persons in the Sierra Vista United Methodist Church who have direct or indirect contact with Participants (Children, Youth, or Vulnerable Adults). This policy sets forth minimum mandatory requirements for screening and training of clergy, lay, staff, or volunteers. Implementation of mandatory ministry procedures and accountability action is required for all ministry leaders within the Sierra Vista United Methodist Church and the Rio Texas Conference.

Commitment

In accordance with the Rio Texas Conference of the United Methodist Church Policy on Child, Youth, and Adult Safety, June, 2017, Sierra Vista United Methodist Church has adopted the following set of Safety Procedures to be implemented no later than the close of Annual Conference 2018. Copies of both documents can be obtained through Sierra Vista United Methodist Church’s office.

This safety policy meets or exceeds the requirements of the Rio Texas Conference of the United Methodist Church Policy on Child, Youth, and Vulnerable Adult Safety, June 2017, and has been reviewed and approved by the Sierra Vista United Methodist Church’s Church Council. Any future revisions shall, at a minimum, meet or exceed the requirements of the Rio Texas Conference of the United Methodist Church Policy on Child, Youth, and Vulnerable Adult Safety, June 2017, and be reviewed and approved by the Sierra Vista United Methodist Church’s Church Council before implementation.

Sierra Vista United Methodist Church is fortunate to have persons with exceptional talent for ministry. We wish to encourage them to use their spiritual gifts. These safety procedures are for

the well-being of our children, youth, and vulnerable adults participating in the ministries of Sierra Vista United Methodist Church. We recognize that safety is an issue that involves the whole church family, not just those who work directly in ministry with children, youth, and vulnerable adults. Therefore, we are asking all of our church family to be informed and help us provide a safe environment for ministry.

Definitions

- A. **Abuse:** any deliberate act that inflicts bodily or emotional harm to a Participant. Abuse includes: (a) the infliction of physical or emotional injury by other than accidental means; (b) the creation of a risk, or allowing the creation of risk, to a Participant by other than accidental means; (c) committing or allowing to be committed an act of Sexual Abuse, Sexual Exploitation, or prostitution upon the Participant.
- B. **Adult Leader:** any person including any paid employee, volunteer, clergy, or lay person in the conference, district, or local church who has the responsibility for the care and Supervision of a Participant at an event.
- C. **Applicant:** any person 18 years of age or older seeking to become an Adult Leader in a local church or for a district or conference event.
- D. **Assistant Leader:** any person 16 years of age or older who has been through the application and safety certification process, but does not qualify for a background check. These are still considered to be Participants and cannot fill the role of a mandatory Adult Leader.
- E. **Day Ministry Event:** an activity, or occasion sponsored by Sierra Vista United Methodist Church that involves a gathering and care of Participants during the hours of 7:00am-10:00pm, and does not occur for more than four hours per day in duration of four or more consecutive days.
- F. **Exploitation:** obtaining or using another person's income, assets, or possessions with the intent to deprive the person of those resources.
- G. **Neglect:** failure to provide nutritional, medical, surgical, or any other care necessary for the well-being of the Participants.
- H. **Overnight/Extended Hour Ministry Event:** a local church, conference, or district sponsored activity, or occasion that involves a gathering and care of Participants for more than four hours per day in duration of four consecutive days or involves an overnight stay.
- I. **Participant:** a Child, Youth, or Vulnerable Adult that is registered, enrolled, attending, or otherwise participating in an event or activity sponsored by Sierra Vista United Methodist Church.
 - 1. **Child:** any person 11 years of age or younger.
 - 2. **Youth:** a person 12-17 years of age.
 - 3. **Vulnerable Adult:** persons over 18 years of age with physical, mental, and/or developmental disabilities.
- J. **Prostitution:** the engagement in, the offer to engage in, or the forced engagement of a Participant in sexual contact by either soliciting or receiving a fee or other benefit.
- K. **Rule of Three:** the standard that requires the presence of two unrelated Adult Leaders at all ministry events involving Participants. Any engagement with a Participant requires the presence of two Adult Leaders.
- L. **Safety Policy Administrator:** the staff member at Sierra Vista United Methodist Church charged with the maintenance, implementation, and enforcement of the Sierra Vista United

Methodist Church Safety Policy. The Safety Policy Administrator may put together a team to help with this task, but he/she retains overall responsibility. The Safety Policy Administrator reports directly to the senior pastor.

- M. **Sexual Abuse:** any sexual contact, sexually explicit language, gestures, or images directed to a Participant.
- N. **Sexual Exploitation:** any deliberate act that allows or encourages a Participant to engage in an act of obscene or pornographic photography, filming, or depiction of a Participant as prohibited under Texas law.
- O. **Supervision:** the leadership role of a person who is in charge of a group of Participants, giving direction, setting boundaries, disciplining appropriately, maintaining safety and being the leader in all situations.

SAFE MINISTRY MANDATES

In accordance with the Rio Texas Conference Safety Policy, Sierra Vista United Methodist Church commits to provide adequate Supervision from Adult Leaders:

- A. All ministry events with Participants shall follow the Rule of Three with a minimum of one Adult Leader for every eight Participants.
- B. Any one-to-one mentoring or consulting shall be conducted in sight of another Adult Leader.
- C. Adult Leaders and Assistant Leaders working with children and youth must be at least five years older than the oldest Participants with whom they work.
- D. Assistant Leaders must work under the Supervision of two Adult Leaders.
- E. Overnight Ministry Events
 - 1. Co-ed Overnight Ministry Events require co-ed Adult Leaders.
 - 2. Sleeping accommodations shall include sleeping distance of no less than three feet between Adult Leaders, Assistant Leaders, and Participants.
 - 3. Every Participant shall have a completed medical release and parental/legal guardian permission form before they will be permitted to participate at any Overnight Ministry Event.
- F. Travel
 - 1. Only Adult Leaders will be permitted to drive Participants to ministry events. Drivers must
 - a. be 21 years or older;
 - b. have a valid driver's license;
 - c. have proof of insurance at the state's minimum limits; and
 - d. not be otherwise disqualified from driving (i.e., under medication, impaired, etc.).
 - 2. Written permission from a parent/legal guardian is required for events requiring transportation to and from the event location.
- G. Phone, video, and online communication:
 - 1. Adult Leaders must notify parents/legal guardians before requesting access, friending, texting, contacting a Participant via social media, or using any other form of online phone/video communication.

2. Using the Rule of Three, all group or social media communications must include two Adult Leaders who serve as administrators/moderators. All groups must be closed, private, and shall require the site administrator's approval to join.
- H. Adult Leaders shall not photograph Participants for use on internet media or in print media without written permission of parent/legal guardian. Further, all names, ages, and locations of Participants will be withheld when publishing their photos.

IMPLEMENTATION: SCREENING, TRAINING, AND ACCOUNTABILITY

A. SCREENING

1. Adult Leaders and Assistant Leaders shall submit an application for ministry along with three (work, volunteer, or ministry) references. References shall be checked by conference, district, or local church staff responsible for Applicants.
2. Applicants should be active in the local church/ministry for a minimum of six months prior to the event or provide additional references affirming their positive leadership with Participants in another ministry setting. In the case of new staff hires, references deemed adequate by the hiring supervisor will replace the six-month waiting period. In the case of Adult Ministry Leaders or Assistant Leaders, previous ministry experience within the Rio Texas Conference may be transferred in lieu of the six-month waiting period, pending approval of Rio Texas Conference office.
3. Background screening:
 - a. Adult Leaders shall submit a signed authorization form for a criminal background screening to be completed by the Rio Texas Conference Office every two years. This will include a signed statement that they are not aware of any allegations that would prevent them from working with Participants.
 - b. If results of the screening raise questions about fitness of the Applicant, the Rio Texas Conference Office shall disapprove the application and notify the event leader and/or local church. Results of criminal background screenings shall be kept confidential. Applicants can request that the Conference Office share the results of their criminal background screening with another district or local church in the Rio Texas Conference via a signed request authorization form.

B. TRAINING AND CERTIFICATION

All Adult Leaders and Assistant Leaders must be certified for their work at conference, district, and local church events. Certification includes:

1. Evaluation of and submission of the local church policy every year. All Adult Leaders and Assistant Leaders must receive, read, and acknowledge their understanding of the most recent version of Sierra Vista United Methodist Church's Child, Safety, and Vulnerable Adult Safety Policy by signing and dating the policy. This signed copy will be kept on file in the Sierra Vista United Methodist Church Office. Any Adult Leader or Assistant Leader will receive his or her own copy for future reference.
2. Completion of Abuse prevention training every year.
3. Safety Certification every two years. Certification will include the following modules:
 - a. Overview of Rio Texas Conference policy.
 - b. Abuse prevention.

- c. Creating safe spaces, best practices for ministry, sexual ethics and appropriate leader behavior.
- d. Overnight/extended hour ministry training.
- e. The certification process will be designed by the Rio Texas Conference and will be offered by trained persons in every district.

C. ACCOUNTABILITY

- 1. As with every ministry of the Rio Texas Annual Conference, Sierra Vista United Methodist Church will maintain a policy that is compliant with the minimum standards of Rio Texas Policy.
 - 2. Sierra Vista United Methodist Church will maintain communication with the West District Superintendent and his or her office to ensure that all minimum standards of the Rio Texas Policy are being met.
 - 3. Sierra Vista United Methodist Church will review its policy annually.
- D. The designated Safety Policy Administrator at Sierra Vista United Methodist Church will oversee and coordinate all screening, training, and accountability.

REPORTING ABUSE

Sierra Vista United Methodist Church procedures for reporting Abuse are as follows:

- A. The parent or guardian of the child will be notified.
- B. The worker or church member alleged to be the perpetrator of the abuse or misconduct will immediately be placed on leave related to any conference, district, or local church events pending an investigation and instructed to remain away from the premises during the investigation. He or she should be instructed to have no contact with the victim or with witnesses.
- C. All reports of alleged Abuse should be documented in writing and brought immediately to the attention of Sierra Vista United Methodist Church. Texas is a mandatory reporting state. Reports of Abuse, Neglect, Exploitation or Sexual Exploitation of Participants shall be made within 48 hours of suspicion to the Department of Family and Protective services through the Texas Abuse Hotline: 1-800-252-5400 or www.txabusehotline.org.
- D. The insurance company will be notified, and the organization will complete an incident report. Any documents received relating to the incident and/or allegations will immediately be forwarded to the insurance company.
- E. Reports of Abuse allegations shall follow notification procedures to the senior pastor, District Superintendent, and/or Bishop, as required by *The Book of Discipline*.
- F. Local church staff shall alert the Rio Texas Conference Director of Communications and Media Support when a statement is requested or made to media.
- G. A pastoral visit will be arranged for those who desire it. This should be for the purpose of providing pastoral support during the time of crisis and not for the purpose of investigating the incident or influencing the investigation.
- H. The designated Safety Policy Administrator at Sierra Vista United Methodist Church will oversee and coordinate all reporting abuse.

Statement of Acknowledgement and Agreement

I have received and read a copy of the “CHILD, YOUTH & VULNERABLE ADULT SAFETY POLICY MANDATORY STANDARDS FOR SIERRA VISTA UNITED METHODIST CHURCH” and understand the importance of the material therein.

I agree to abide by these guidelines while serving or working at Sierra Vista United Methodist Church. I understand the policy may be and has been modified and that any guideline may be amended, revised, or eliminated by Sierra Vista United Methodist Church. I further understand that it is my responsibility to review any new guidelines which may be created and distributed.

Staff Member or Volunteer’s Name (Please Print)

Staff Member or Volunteer’s Signature

Date: _____

This page should be detached and turned in to Sierra Vista UMC’s Safety Policy Administrator.