

# **Safe Sanctuary Policy**

**Wells Memorial United Methodist Church**

2019 Bailey Ave.  
Jackson, MS 39213

**Approved by the Administrative Board**

**July 27, 2018**

“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 the faith, and confirmed and strengthened in the way that leads to life eternal.”

— Congregational Pledge 2 from *The United Methodist Hymnal* ©1989

## **Wells Memorial United Methodist Church Safe Sanctuary Policy**

### **Our Calling**

Loving, caring, sharing. Those are the words listed on the sign in front of Wells Church, but those words are more than a motto. They embody the spirit and mission of our congregation, which worships and carries on the work of Christ in the inner city of Jackson, Mississippi. All are truly welcome in this place. We consider ourselves as fellow strugglers, a branch of the vine of Christ, seeking to love the Lord, serve others, and be faithful witness to God through service and love in the name of Jesus Christ.

### **Our Mandate**

In 1996, the General Conference of the United Methodist Church adopted a resolution aimed at reducing the risk of child abuse in church. The Mississippi Conference of the United Methodist Church followed by requiring that all churches develop a plan to prevent child abuse. In 2016, the Mississippi Conference amended its resolutions on reducing the risk of abuse to include vulnerable adults.

### **Our Purpose**

The purpose of this document is to ensure that the members and staff of Wells Church do all they can to provide a safe and secure environment for nursery infants and toddlers, preschoolers, children, youth, vulnerable adults, and all persons entrusted to our care. The following policies and procedures are for the protection of our children, youth, employees, volunteers, and our entire church family at Wells Memorial United Methodist Church in Jackson, Mississippi. By establishing these policies and procedures, we demonstrate our commitment to provide a safe environment for our children, youth, and vulnerable adults as they grow in their relationship with God. We believe it is possible for us to greatly reduce the risk of abuse by following these procedures.

### **Our Covenant**

Therefore, as a Christian community of faith and a United Methodist congregation, we pledge to conduct the ministry of Jesus Christ in ways that assure the safety of our children and youth, as well as those who work with them. We pledge the same conduct with respect to vulnerable adults who worship alongside us and participate in our ministries. We will follow reasonable safety measures in the selection and recruitment of workers; we will implement sensible, practical operating procedures in our ministries; we will educate our workers with children, youth, and vulnerable adults regarding the use of appropriate procedures; we will have a clearly defined procedure for reporting any suspected incident of abuse that conforms to the requirements of the laws of Mississippi; and we will be prepared to respond should such an incident occur.

In all our ministries with children, youth, and vulnerable adults, this congregation is committed to demonstrating the love of Jesus Christ so that every person, child or adult, will be “surrounded by steadfast love...established in the faith and confirmed and strengthened in the way that leads to life eternal.” (from “Baptismal Covenant 2,” *The United Methodist Hymnal*)

## **Definitions**

Children include any person from birth through age 12, or in grades up to sixth.

Youth include any person from age 13 through age 20, or in seventh through twelfth grade.

Adults include any persons age 21 or above.

While persons may legally be considered adults at age 18, to encourage adherence to the “3-year rule,” Wells requires that “adults” be at least 21 years of age.

Vulnerable adults include any person over the age of 18 whose ability to perform the normal activities of daily living or to provide for his/her own care or protection is impaired due to a mental, emotional, physical or developmental disability or dysfunction, or brain damage, or the infirmities of aging.

Workers include adults who are paid and adults who volunteer.

## **General Procedures**

1. Wells Memorial United Methodist Church’s Safe Sanctuary Policy will be reviewed and approved annually by the Administrative Council and available to all staff members.
  - a. Staff and volunteers who work with children, youth, and vulnerable adults will receive a copy of the Safe Sanctuary Policy.
  - b. Parents will receive a copy of the Safe Sanctuary Policy when their children enter the nursery, when their children enter the pre-K Sunday school class, and when their children enter the youth group at grade 7. Family members or guardians of vulnerable adults will receive a copy of the Safe Sanctuary Policy when their vulnerable adult relative or charge becomes active in any church-related activity.
  - c. The Safe Sanctuary Policy will be included in all new member packets, available for pick-up in the church information area, and available online at wellschurch.org.
  - d. The Safe Sanctuary Policy will be reviewed annually and revised by a task force designated by the church’s policy-making body and recommended to said body for approval. The task force will include all paid staff and lay representatives from each of the following: children’s ministry, youth ministry, Administrative Board, Council on Ministries, SPPRC, and may include any other designee with specialized knowledge relevant to the task.
  - e. The pastor and the director of Christian education will work together to develop the forms referred to within the Safe Sanctuary Policy. Appropriate forms will be available in the church office and be supplied to staff and volunteers who work with children, youth, and vulnerable adults and, when appropriate, to staff and volunteers of organizations or groups that use Wells Memorial United Methodist Church facilities.

2. Church staff and those who receive compensation/salary from Wells Memorial United Methodist Church shall be approved for hire by the SPPRC after a background check.
3. Volunteers and staff who work with children, youth, and vulnerable adults will be offered training in regard to the implementation of the Safe Sanctuary Policy and will be required to authorize Wells Memorial United Methodist Church to complete a background check through the Mississippi United Methodist Church Conference, and to sign a safe sanctuary participation covenant.
4. Background checks will be conducted according to the recommendations and procedures outlined by the Mississippi UMC Conference.
5. Facility doors will be locked when not in use. These include classrooms, closets, and kitchens. Christian education classrooms will be opened by teachers and locked when classes are complete.
6. Staff, leaders, and other volunteers will know the location of the emergency aid kits and phone access for emergency medical assistance.
  - a. Phones are available in the church offices and children's area.
  - b. First aid kits are available in the kitchen, the children's area, the youth building/James Club, Serendipity House, and the church office.
  - c. An automated external defibrillator or AED (a portable, electronic device that automatically diagnoses cardiac arrhythmias and is able to treat them through defibrillation) is located in the church office. With simple audio and visual commands, AEDs are designed to be simple to use for the average person.
7. No fewer than two unrelated adult leaders will be present at all events for children, youth, or vulnerable adults, on or off campus. At least one leader present will be an adult 21 years of age or older who has been an active part of Wells Memorial United Methodist Church for six months or longer, has authorized a background check, and has been trained in Safe Sanctuary Policy and procedures.
  - a. In the event it is not feasible to have two leaders in every room, such as when a large group is divided into smaller groups, doors will remain open and a floater will check on each group.
  - b. All teachers and leaders are strongly encouraged to avoid being alone with a child, youth, or vulnerable adult.
  - c. How parents decide to transport children and/or youth between their homes and the church for an event (or to an off-site event) is each parent's individual decision and responsibility.
  - d. For overnight events, at least two adults of each gender will be present. At single-gender overnight events, at least two adults present will be of the same gender as the participating youth or vulnerable adult. When adults share rooms with children and/or youth, two unrelated adults of the same gender must share the room with children/youth of that gender.

8. Volunteers who serve as teachers and leaders of children and youth will be at least 3 years older than the oldest person they are teaching or leading.
9. Background check procedures for staff and volunteers are as follows:
  - a. Volunteers and staff submitting to a background check must complete an authorization form available through the pastor(s) or church office. This form will be supplied to all persons completing Safe Sanctuary training. Authorization forms should be turned in to the pastor or church office for submission.
  - b. Background checks for Wells Memorial United Methodist Church's employees and volunteers will be paid through the church budget. Background checks for volunteers for other organizations are the responsibility of that organization.
  - c. Only the pastor(s) will see the results of the background checks and determine the eligibility of persons to work with children and youth. Other staff members will receive a list of persons who have been approved for service with children, youth, and vulnerable adults.
  - d. Background checks must be renewed at least every 5 years.
  - e. Persons who are found to represent a potential threat of committing abuse or violating this policy will not be allowed to serve as teachers, leaders, or helpers with children, youth, or vulnerable adults.
10. A minimum ratio of one adult volunteer worker per 10 children/youth will be maintained in each situation involving the supervision of children and youth.
  - a. Wells Memorial United Methodist Church is responsible for each child/youth in attendance at an event from the beginning to the end of the event, in the location at which the event occurs. Parents must be attentive to sign-in/sign-out procedures. Children may only be released to persons other than parents if prior contact has occurred between parents and the staff person in charge.
11. Wells Memorial United Methodist Church is not responsible for children/youth who are not signed in to an event.
12. Sign-in procedures will be developed by the director of Christian education, reviewed by the pastor(s), and communicated to parents and/or guardians.
13. Standard permission forms will be required for each off-campus event involving children and youth. Two unrelated adults should be present in each vehicle transporting children, youth, and or vulnerable adults.
14. Social media must be used judiciously. Church staff and volunteers may not post names of children, youth, or vulnerable adults on social media, may not tag locations of children, youth or vulnerable adults on social media, may not post pictures of children, youth or vulnerable adults on social media without a parent's

or guardian's permission via photo release. When church staff and volunteers use electronic communication methods such as group chats they must include their counterpart adults in ministry (for transparency) and parents and/or guardians may opt in to such chats.

15. All outside organizations that use Wells Memorial United Methodist Church facilities or grounds will abide by Wells Safe Sanctuary policies and procedures. Such organizations will be asked to sign a covenant that they have read and agree to abide by Wells Church's Safe Sanctuary policies and procedures.
16. Sunday school classroom, nursery doors, youth classrooms, and doors to the offices of children and youth workers must have a window. The windows of these rooms must not be covered when rooms are in use by children or youth.
17. Liability insurance coverage: Wells Memorial United Methodist Church Trustees shall maintain liability insurance coverage to meet or exceed the amount required by the Mississippi Annual Conference.

### **Procedures Specific to Children and Youth**

1. Children and youth will attend the appropriate grade/age level Christian education equivalent to the grade/age level they attend in school or preschool.
  - a. Preschool children should be placed according to their birth dates, following the same guidelines as the state of Mississippi. A child must reach age-level of the class by the specified date of that year to be eligible for attendance. In other words, to attend the pre-K 4 class that begins with the new school year in August 2016, the child must be four years old by Sept. 1, 2016.
  - b. Any child in kindergarten or above should attend the same grade level of Christian education as they attend in school.
  - c. Promotion occurs in August in conjunction with the new school year. Children and youth move to the next grade at that time.
2. Children not currently signed into a classroom or event are the responsibility of their parents and must be attended to by their parents. Children must be supervised at all times while on church property.
3. Parents or adults who bring children to Wells Memorial United Methodist Church are encouraged to remain on the property while their children are signed into Wells Church ministries. Persons who leave the property while the children for whom they are responsible are signed into classes or events will provide emergency contact information. In the case of neighborhood children who come to Wells Memorial United Methodist Church without parental supervision to participate in Wells Church Ministries, the director of Christian education and the pastor will make efforts to connect with parents or guardians of those children within two weeks of the child's first participation. At this time, the parents or

guardians will be given a copy of the Safe Sanctuary Policy and asked to provide emergency contact information.

4. Like other class rolls, the Sunday school sign-in sheets will become part of the permanent attendance records and Sunday School archives.
5. During Christian education class time, children age 3 through grade 6 will use the restroom in the red rug area.

### **Procedures for Reporting Incidents of Abuse**

1. According to the laws of Mississippi, all persons who work with children and youth are mandatory reporters of child abuse. If a person learns of or witnesses an instance of abuse, that person shall immediately report the alleged incident of abuse or suspected abuse to the appropriate county or state authorities. The telephone number for reporting incidents of abuse, neglect, or exploitation of a child in Mississippi is 800-222-8000 or 601-432-4570.
2. Any Wells Memorial United Methodist Church staff or volunteer who learns of or witnesses an instance of abuse against a vulnerable adult shall immediately report the alleged incident of abuse or suspected abuse to the appropriate state authorities. The telephone number for reporting incidents of abuse of vulnerable adults in Mississippi is: 844-437-6282.
3. Incidents of abuse or reasonably suspected incidents of abuse of children, youth, or vulnerable adults will also be reported as soon as possible to the pastor or Wells Memorial United Methodist Church office staff. In the case that the pastor is the person accused, the incident should be reported to the West Jackson District Superintendent at (601) 944-0776.
4. The person reporting the incident will document, in writing, all known facts and circumstances and will also make a report that documents all steps taken in the course of handling the reported incident using the appropriate forms. (See Appendix A)
5. The pastor(s) and/or staff member will document all actions taken in reporting the incident of abuse using the appropriate forms.
6. The confidentiality of all persons involved will be safeguarded.

### **Responding to Allegations of Abuse**

1. Every allegation will be taken seriously. Adequate care and respect must be offered to the alleged victim and alleged perpetrators until the allegations can be substantiated or cleared.

2. The safety and security of the alleged victim must be safeguarded before the person accused of abuse is confronted.
3. The parents or guardians of the suspected victim will be notified immediately.
4. All procedures listed in the previous section on reporting will be strictly followed.
5. All records relating to the matter will be maintained in confidential files.
6. All efforts in handling the matter will be carefully documented.
7. The pastor or designee will notify the church's liability insurer about the alleged incident.
8. The pastor will be the sole spokesperson for Wells Memorial United Methodist Church, except in such cases as the pastor is the accused, and the West Jackson District Superintendent will be the sole spokesperson for the district insofar as media inquiries may be concerned, and in cases where the pastor is the accused.
9. Any person accused must be treated with dignity and support. The person will immediately be relieved of further responsibilities, as circumstances dictate, until the allegations are cleared or substantiated.

**Appendix A**  
**Incident Report of Suspected Child, Youth, or Vulnerable Adult Abuse**

1. Name of worker (paid or volunteer) observing or receiving disclosure of suspected abuse of child, youth, or vulnerable adult: \_\_\_\_\_
  
2. Suspected victim's name: \_\_\_\_\_  
Suspected victim's date of birth: \_\_\_\_\_
  
3. Date and place of initial conversation with / report from suspected victim:  
\_\_\_\_\_
  
4. Suspected victim's statement (give a detailed summary here):  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
  
5. Name of person (s) accused of abuse: \_\_\_\_\_  
Relationship of accused to victim (paid staff, volunteer, family member, etc.)  
\_\_\_\_\_
  
6. Summary of call to MS Child Abuse Hotline: 800-222-8000 or 601-432-4570  
Or call to Vulnerable Person Abuse Hotline: 844-437-6282.  
Date/time: \_\_\_\_\_  
Spoke with: \_\_\_\_\_  
Summary:  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

7. Call to suspected victim’s parent/guardian:

Date/time: \_\_\_\_\_

Spoke with: \_\_\_\_\_

Summary:  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

8. Reported to Pastor:

Date/time: \_\_\_\_\_

Spoke with: \_\_\_\_\_

Summary:  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

9. Other Contacts Made:

Date/time: \_\_\_\_\_

Spoke with: \_\_\_\_\_

Summary:  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Person Making the Report

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date