

Wells Memorial United Methodist Church
2019 Bailey Ave.
Jackson, MS 39213

Safe Sanctuary Policy

Approved by the Administrative Board
October 11, 2015

“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.

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, preschoolers, children, youth, 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 United Methodist Church in Jackson, MS. By establishing these policies and procedures, we demonstrate our commitment to provide a safe environment for our children and youth 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 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 and youth 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 and youth, this congregation is committed to demonstrating the love of Jesus Christ so that each child 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.

Youth include any person from age 13 through age 20.

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.

General Procedures

1. Wells United Methodist Church’s Safe Sanctuary Policy will be reviewed and approved annually by the Administrative Board and available to all staff members.
 - a. Staff and volunteers who work with children and youth 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.
 - 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 annually reviewed and revised by a task force and recommended to the Administrative Board 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.
2. Church staff and those who receive compensation/salary from the church shall be approved for hire by the SPPRC after a background check.
3. Volunteers and staff who work with children and youth will be offered training in regard to the implementation of the Safe Sanctuary Policy and will be required to authorize Wells Church to complete a background check through the MS UMC Conference (Appendix C) found at www.mississippiumc.org/files/fileshare/backgroundconsentform.pdf, and to sign a safe sanctuary participation covenant (Appendix A).
4. Background checks will be conducted according to the recommendations and procedures outlined by the MS UMC Conference at <http://www.mississippi-umc.org/backgroundchecks>.
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, children's area, and kitchen.
 - b. First aid kits are available in the kitchen, the children's area, 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 leaders will be present at all children and/or youth events, 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 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 or youth.
 - c. 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.

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. Volunteers and staff who work with children and youth will be required to submit to a background check.
 - a. Volunteers and staff submitting to a background check must complete an authorization form available through the associate pastor or church office. This form will be supplied to all persons completing Safe Sanctuary training. Authorization forms should be turned in to the associate pastor or pastoral assistant for submission.
 - b. Background checks for Wells 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 associate pastor will see the results of the background checks and determine the eligibility of persons to work with children and youth. Other staff members may receive a list of persons who have been approved for service with children and youth.
 - d. All background checks will be kept confidential. Files from background checks will be kept in a locked cabinet with other personnel files in the associate pastor's office.

- e. Background checks must be renewed every 5 years.
 - f. Persons who have resided in Mississippi less than three years will have a background check in their previous state of residence.
 - g. 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 and/or youth.
10. A minimum of ratio of one adult volunteer worker per 10 children/youth will be maintained in each situation involving the supervision of children and youth.
11. Wells 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 procedures.
- a. Children may not leave prior to the ending of an event without prior notice from a parent.
 - b. Children may only be released to persons other than parents if prior contact has occurred between parents and the staff person in charge.
 - c. Wells Church is not responsible for children/youth who are not signed in to an event.
12. Permission forms will be required for each off-campus event involving children and youth.
13. Social media must be used judiciously.
- a. All facebook and social media groups and pages associated with nursery, children, or youth shall be designated as “closed” groups, requiring those who wish to gain access to be approved by the page administrators.
 - b. All church-related facebook groups and/or pages must have at least two administrators. If an administrator is no longer associated with the ministry, that individual’s administrative status must be revoked.
 - c. Photos may be posted to Facebook or other social media sites by page administrators. Photos must not be tagged with name or location indicators of minors. Parents must be given the opportunity to opt out of this to prohibit posting. All photos must be appropriate and within the spirit or mission of our ministry. Photos used in other electronic or print media such as church newsletters, web sites, blogs, etc. must not include any identifying information of minors without prior parent permission. Individuals may tag themselves. We discourage youth from taking and posting photos of children participating in church events on all personal social media sites.
 - d. When checking in on Foursquare, Facebook, or other location-tagging social media, only check in yourself. Never check in minors. Be sensitive to tagging or revealing other participants’ locations without their express permission.

- e. In the case of clergy and member online connections, friend requests should be initiated by the member. Caution should be exercised in “friending” minors on social media.
 - f. The church’s wi-fi must either not be available for children and youth or must include controls to prevent access of inappropriate content.
14. All outside organizations that use the 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.
 15. Sunday school classroom and nursery doors must have a window. The windows of these rooms must not be covered when rooms are in use by children or youth.
 16. Liability insurance coverage: Wells Church Trustees shall maintain liability insurance coverage of at least \$1,000,000 per event / \$3,000,000 aggregate for activities both on and off church property. Liability insurance should include at least \$1,000,000 per event / 2,000,000 aggregate coverage for sexual misconduct claims.

Procedures Specific to Children

1. Children will attend the appropriate grade/age level 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 move to the next grade at that time.
2. Children in birth through Grade 2 will be signed into and out of any activity by an adult, preferably a parent.
 - a. Children birth through grade 2 may not be released to a sibling less than 18 years of age without written parental permission.
 - b. Children in grades 3-6 may sign themselves in and out of a classroom or event in the presence of a parent or other adult guardian.
3. 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.

4. Parents or adults who bring children to Wells 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.
5. Like other class rolls, the Sunday school sign-in sheets will become part of the permanent attendance records and Sunday School archives.
6. During Christian education class time, children age 3 through grade 1 will use the restrooms 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. Incidents of abuse or reasonably suspected incidents of abuse of children or youth will also be reported as soon as possible to the associate or senior pastor or Wells 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.
3. 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 D)
4. The pastor and/or staff member will document all actions taken in reporting the incident of abuse using the appropriate forms.
5. 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 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 his designee will notify the church's liability insurer about the alleged incident.
8. The pastor will be the sole spokesperson for Wells Church and the district superintendent will be the sole spokesperson for the district insofar as media inquiries may be concerned.
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

**Volunteer Participation Covenant for
Persons Working with Children and Youth at
Wells United Methodist Church**

As a member of a Christian Community of Faith and a United Methodist Congregation, I pledge to conduct the ministry of Jesus Christ in ways that assure the safety of our children and youth, as well as of other workers with children and youth, by committing to the following:

___ I will receive training in regard to Safe Sanctuary policies and procedures.

___ I will follow reasonable safety measures and Safe Sanctuary operating procedures.

___ In all my ministries with children and/or youth, I will demonstrate the love of Jesus Christ so that each child will be “surrounded by steadfast love...established in the faith and confirmed and strengthened in the way that leads to life eternal.” (Congregational Pledge 2 from the Baptismal Covenant in *The United Methodist Hymnal* ©1989)

Printed Name _____

Signature _____

Date _____

Appendix B

**Organization Covenant for
Groups Working with Children and Youth at
Wells United Methodist Church**

As an organization cooperating with a Christina community of faith and a United Methodist congregation, we pledge to conduct our activities in ways that assure the safety of our children and youth, as well as of other workers with children and youth, by committing to the following:

- ___ We will read and follow Wells United Methodist Church’s Safe Sanctuary policies and procedures.

- ___ We will make participating children, youth, and parents aware of these policies and procedures.

- ___ We will follow reasonable safety measures and Safe Sanctuary operating procedures.

Printed Name _____

Signature _____

Date _____

Appendix C
MS Conference of the United Methodist Church
Background Check Consent Form

This document may be found at

<http://www.mississippi-umc.org/files/fileshare/backgroundconsentform.pdf>

Appendix D
Incident Report of Suspected Child or Youth Abuse

1. Name of worker (paid or volunteer) observing or receiving disclosure of suspected abuse of child or youth: _____

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:
Date/time: _____
Spoke with: _____
Summary: _____

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

Date/time: _____

Spoke with: _____

Summary: _____

8. Reported to Pastor or Associate Pastor:

Date/time: _____

Spoke with: _____

Summary: _____

9. Other Contacts Made:

Date/time: _____

Spoke with: _____

Summary: _____

Signature of Person Making the Report

Date