

## A Model for a Local Church Policy on Safe Sanctuary

- **Policy on Background Checks for persons working with children, youth, and vulnerable adults in a position of trust.**
- **Policy on Safety before welcoming “persons of concern” into the congregation.**
- **Safe Practices When Working with Children, Youth, and Vulnerable Adults**

Both the above policies draw from publications entitled, *Safe Sanctuaries, Reducing the Risk of Child Abuse in the Church*, and *Safe Sanctuaries, Reducing the Risk of Abuse in Youth Ministries*, and an article, “*Can An Offender Join My Church?*” all written by Joy Thornburg Melton, an ordained United Methodist deacon in North Georgia Conference and an attorney specializing in sexual abuse cases. The policies are further informed by guidelines issued by Church Mutual, our current insurance carrier, the laws of the State of Colorado, and prior work done by the Rocky Mountain Conference of the United Methodist Church.

This policy was compiled by a team of educators, lawyers, doctors, concerned parents, and the Ethical Education Task Force of the Rocky Mountain Conference UMC.

### **Who can volunteer to work with children, youth, and vulnerable adults in a position of trust?**

Persons who volunteer to work in a position of trust for this ministry, must be a regular church attendee for a minimum of 6 months and each new volunteer and or paid worker will need to have the following documents on file and approved by the appropriate supervisor:

- Authorization/permission to conduct a background check
- Clearance from the NCIC (National register) and State Bureau of Investigations  
\*It is recommended that disclosure of all states where applicant has lived in last 10-15 years be made available.
- Job Application and Description
- Reference follow up form
- Covenant stating participation in Safe Sanctuary training
- I-9 (for paid workers)
- W-4 sent to finance (for paid workers also)

### **Background Checks**

Background checks may be conducted through Choice Point, a company that works with Church Mutual Insurance. A package that covers the National Sex Offender listing, and the State Bureau of Investigations should be in place. **Conference level volunteers and paid staff must also obtain a fingerprint check.** Permission to perform a background check requires a signature by the volunteer or paid worker on the authorization form; it does not require a notarization. Motor Vehicle checks are also suggested where appropriate, as well as credit report checks for those who handle money in the congregation. All background checks should be updated (repeated) every four (4) years for volunteers & paid staff who remain working with children, youth, and vulnerable adults.

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Background checks conducted for other purposes (e.g., employment outside the Church) or by other organizations may not be used to meet this requirement.

Background checks on file are to be kept under double lock (locked file cabinet inside a locked closet). For the local church, it is suggested that the Director of Christian Education, Preschool director (if applicable), Pastors, the Lay Leader, vice-chair of Lay Leadership, and the chair of Staff parish Relations, have access to the background checks. This team of people is referred to hereafter as the “Background Check Response Team”.

### **Red Flags**

If a “red flag” should appear on a background check or application information, the resulting consequences would depend on for what purpose the screening is being conducted. For example, if a driving record were flagged, the person of concern would still be able to work with children, but not drive them to functions. If there is any hint of past inappropriate behavior toward a child, or inappropriate sexual behavior, or records of abuse of any kind, the person will be asked to step down. If a red flag appears, the decisions as to what to do with the information, falls into the hands of the above-mentioned Background Check Response Team. Conference event coordinators will need to check in with the local church pastor if there is a red flag or “person of concern” status on any person applying to work at a Conference level event.

### **Policy on Safety, before welcoming “persons of concern” into the congregation.**

A “person of concern” would be defined as anybody who would:

- Approach anyone on the Background Check Response Team and share his or her story/issues.
- A “Red-Flag” appears on a background check
- The Background Check Response Team is made aware of the “person of concern” through community sources.

It is expected that anyone with a “background of concern” have a detailed conversation with the Pastor(s) describing the issues surrounding the concern. The fact that the person is having the conversation implies that he or she is in a position of seeking grace and wholeness in connection with their involvement in the body of Christ, the church.

Following the initial conversation with the person of concern, the Pastor(s) will call a meeting of the Background Check Response Team to share the details of the conversation and to develop the appropriate response that balances the modeling of the grace of Jesus Christ with the safety of all in the congregation (which includes the person of concern).

Assuming the person of concern is a criminal offender (on parole, serving probation, or has a history of such) or is in the process of working through a criminal proceeding, the Background Check Response Team will determine the appropriate level of engagement with civil authorities (probation or parole officers, criminal records, mental health professionals, etc.)

Once parole/probation restrictions related to participation in church have been identified,

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inform the individual that it is possible for him/her to participate in the congregation on very specific conditions that are documented and signed by the individual and the Background Check Response Team. This document will be referred to as the “Covenant Agreement” between the person of concern and Longs Peak United Methodist Church.

**Specific Conditions, which may appear in the Covenant Agreement by LPUMC**

He/she may attend worship services, adult Sunday school, and other ministries only when accompanied by a “shepherd”, a member of the congregation approved by the Background Check Response Team. There may be a variety of shepherds assigned. For example, one for Sunday morning, one for Wednesday evening.

The shepherd must be with the individual at all times when he/she is at the church, even in the rest room.

Depending on the specifics involved,

- The individual may not be permitted to enter areas of the Church property that are used by children and youth, even if the shepherd accompanies him or her.
- The individual may not be accepted as a volunteer in any capacity that would provide opportunities for contact with children and youth
- The person of concern may be asked to share the limitations of his/her participation per the Covenant Agreement with any and all persons who need to know, (as determined by the Background Check Response Team)
- The Background Check Response Team may ask the person of concern to leave the congregation if any of these conditions are not followed.
- In the event that a shepherd must leave his/her post, the person of concern will be assigned a new shepherd.

## **Recommended Safe Practices When Working with Children and Youth**

- Be trained annually in order to keep updated on the most current safety procedures in their area.
- Be trained for evacuation in case of a fire, first aid, CPR, awareness of blood born pathogens, and other harmful substances, and procedures for handling allergic reactions, and dispensing medications.
- (Refer to the website suggestions listed on the “Helpful Resources” page).
- Be required to be either a member or regular attendee of the church in order to work with children in a position of trust.
- Have an application, reference check (youth) and background check on file.
- Review a written job description for their area.
- Not transport a child to or from a program while alone in a vehicle with the child without parental consent.
- If driving, will consent to a motor vehicle check, and submit a copy of both a valid driver’s license and insurance card, and be at least 25 years of age.
- Children under the age of four will be supervised while in the bathrooms and doors will remain open.
- Children fifth grade and younger will not be dismissed from a room without supervision.
- Keep doors and blinds open during class. If a door has to be closed so that little ones don’t escape, a window must be in the door or the top half of the door must be open.
- Wear a name tag in order to be identified as a person in a position of trust.
- Use Love and Logic discipline, positive reinforcement.
- Immediately report people of suspicion or suspected child abuse or neglect to the mandatory reporter, and assist in writing up a report.
- Follow safe environment guidelines.
- Always have written parent permission before taking children outside to play, or go on a field trip, or mission trip.
- Report in writing any accidents or unusual problems to the Children or Youth program coordinator.
- Abide by staff/volunteer/child/ratios

### **Recommended Ratios for Adults-to-Children and Youth**

- **Sunday School Classes Pre-Kindergarten through Grade 5**  
**Ratio = 2:15**
- **Youth Classes/Youth Group; Middle and High School Age**  
**Ratio = 2:25 adding one adult for every 10 youth above 25**  
**Adult Sponsors must be 25 years of age or older (there must be a difference of 5 years in age between youth and their sponsor)**
- **1:8 ratio for activities and/or field trips beyond the premises of the local church or ministry setting.**

## **Recommended Safe Practices For the Nursery**

- Two people must be in the nursery at all times (the preference is two adults, or one adult with one youth, High School and above).
- The top of the door should always be left open or window installed.
- Parents must sign in their children, indicating where they can be located in the building and include any allergy or medical information. Also, each child who enters our nursery should have an information sheet on file in case of an emergency. When we have more than 5 children in the nursery, please attach a heart to the back of each child. Each heart has a pair of pins with the same number on it. One is used to pin the heart on the back of the child's shirt, the other is sent with the parents and becomes the "claim ticket" for their child when the parent returns for pick up. At this point, the nursery workers will match the heart number with the number on the pin. Ask the parent to sign out their child, and return the heart and pins.
- Toys will be picked up and put away
- Counters, table and changing table are sanitized with solution, following instructions for keeping safe from pathogens.
- Soiled diapers are placed in the proper receptacles and trash is removed. Change diapers promptly.
- Infants should be kept separate from toddlers.
- Communicate God's love through warmth and caring actions (soft voice, creative play, rocking and reading, appropriate care for the developmental level and age of the child)
- Be aware of allergies and other concerns especially when serving a snack. Be aware of piece size depending on the age of the child. Prevent choking hazards.
- Place toys that have been sucked or chewed on, in the designated basket for cleaning. Be mindful of broken toys, small choking hazards, and toys that need cleaning.
- Be sure that TV monitors are secure and free from falling.
- Be sure that all electric outlets are covered and free from little hands touching.
- Be sure that all cords for pulling blinds and curtains are far from reach, or getting tangled near the cribs.
- Be sure to check the linens in the crib and portable crib. Please alert the nursery coordinator if linens need changing.
- Even in the event of a little "head bump", fill out an accident report.
- Feel free to retrieve mom and dad from the sanctuary if you ever start to feel exasperated. Never, ever shake a baby!
- \*\*\*Please arrive 10 minutes before your shift so to be ready to greet parents wishing to arrive on time for worship.

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## Proper Ratios of Infants and Children to Adults in the Nursery

The following are the Conference requirements for proper ratios of adults to infants and children in a child care center. These meet or exceed requirements from the Colorado Department of Human Services for child care centers with less than 24 hour care.

**The ratio for the youngest child must be utilized if more than 20% of the group is composed of younger children.**

<b>Ages of Children</b>	<b>Number of Staff*</b>
6 weeks to 18 months (infants)	2 staff member to 5 infants
12 months to 36 months	2 staff member to 5 toddlers
24 months to 36 months	2 staff member to 7 toddlers
2 ½ years to 3 years	2 staff member to 8 children
3 years to 4 years	2 staff member to 10 children
4 years to 5 years	2 staff member to 12 children
5 years and older	2 staff member to 15 children
Mixed age group 2 ½ years to 6 years	2 staff member to 10 children

\* "2 Staff Members" means two adults or one adult and one high school age youth

## **Safe Practices When Working With Vulnerable Adults**

- Be alert to signs of abuse or neglect. Abuse can be physical, sexual, verbal, or emotional. It can include unreasonable confinement or restraint, financial exploitation, caregiver neglect, and self-neglect. (See additional website links to defining vulnerable, “At-Risk” adults, signs of abuse, and procedures for reporting abuse.)
- When in ministry with a vulnerable adult(s), there should be windows in the doors, or doors should be designed with top halves that can be opened, to allow clear visibility into the room(s) used for ministry. As when working with children and youth, it is a good idea to work with another adult when in ministry to vulnerable adults in case help needs to be gotten for someone in trouble.
- Report any safety hazards in the physical environment surrounding the vulnerable adult, including any handicap inaccessibility.
- Report any accidents or unusual problems to the Event Coordinator or local church pastor.
- Be aware of fire exits.
- Be trained in First Aid and CPR, in handling blood born pathogens and other bio-hazards, and aware of handling allergic reactions.
- Be aware of the condition of vulnerability by visiting with care takers and those closest to the person of vulnerability. Find out who to contact in case of emergency. In the event that the condition is severe, be sure the person is accompanied by his/her caretaker when participating in a church function. Develop a care file for the individual.