Abuse Prevention Policy
For Children, Youth, and Vulnerable Adults
Missouri Annual Conference – The United Methodist Church

The Missouri Annual Conference is committed to the well being of every person entrusted to its care as well as those persons entrusted to the care of the United Methodist Churches throughout Missouri.

Scope
Missouri United Methodists affirm that all children, youth and vulnerable adults (See definition below) have the right to safe sanctuary. Therefore, Missouri United Methodists are determined to provide an environment in which these persons are safe from neglect or abuse. The scope of this policy and its provisions shall apply to all staff and volunteers, clergy or lay, who have direct or indirect contact with children, youth, or vulnerable adults, or youth in conference and/or district sponsored events. The Missouri Conference Mission Council in consultation with the Conference Certification Authority shall be responsible for reviewing and revising this policy. Each conference and/or district ministry involving children, youth, or vulnerable adults, shall adopt procedures to implement this policy.

Definitions
1. **Physical Abuse** is any deliberate act that inflicts bodily harm to a person.
2. **Sexual Abuse** is any sexual contact or sexually explicit language, gestures, or images by a volunteer or staff person with, or directed to, a participant.
3. **Neglect** is failure to provide nutrition or medical, surgical, or any other care necessary for the well being of the child, youth or vulnerable adults.
4. **Staff** includes any clergy person, any paid employee of the conference or a district, and any paid employee of any group, committee, team or agency of the conference or a district who has the care/supervision of a participant at an event.
5. **Volunteer** is any non-clergy, lay worker who has the care/supervision of a participant at an event. This may include paid staff members of a local church.
6. **Certification Authority** is Director of Connectional Ministries, Director of Camping and Retreat Ministries, and Conference Youth Coordinator.
7. **Participants** are children and youth who are registered, enrolled, attending or otherwise participating in an event or activity sponsored by the annual conference or a district. Participants are also persons who are considered to be vulnerable adults.
8. **Vulnerable adults** are persons over 18 years of age with physical, mental and/or developmental disabilities.
9. **Children** are persons 0-11 years of age.
10. **Youth** are 12-18 years of age.
11. **Conference Certification** is specifically for District or Conference activities because there are additional requirements for supervision at District/Conference events. Examples of District/Conference events are attending the WOW Youth Rally, a conference or district sponsored Mission trip, a conference or district retreat, such as confirmation, serving as a camp counselor, or other conference or district sponsored events.

12. **Local Church Certification** is specifically for events at the local church level such as serving as a Sunday School teacher, a pre-school teacher, serving at a Vacation Bible School, serving in a day care operation, working in a church nursery, providing computer technical support, or serving as a cook, or van driver for a local church event.

13. **Event** is defined as local church, conference or district sponsored activity or ministry that involves a gathering of children, youth, or vulnerable adults.

14. **Supervision** is the ability for a person to be in charge of a group of children, youth or vulnerable adults, giving direction, setting boundaries, disciplining appropriately, maintaining safety and being the adult in all situations.

15. **National Screen** is the conducting of a search of publicly available websites through a third party contractor for information about criminal convictions of the applicant and whether the applicant’s name appears on the National Sex Offender list.

**Standards for Staff / Volunteers**

1. All applicants for Conference Certification must submit an application; pay a fee; submit references and complete the required training.

2. Applicants who are 19 years of age or older must also authorize the Conference Certification Authority to conduct a National Screen. Applicants younger than 19 will not be required to authorize a National Screen because records of criminal convictions for minors are sealed from public scrutiny.

3. Youth under the age of 19, and at least 15, must serve under the supervision of one or more certified adults who are 22 years of age or older. All staff/volunteers must be at least four years older than the oldest participants with whom they work.

4. A background screening approved by the Safe Sanctuaries office is required for all staff/volunteers. Staff/volunteers from outside of the United States of America or without a social security number for whom a background screening cannot be completed may be verified and allowed to work under the supervision of a properly certified adult.

5. All staff/volunteers shall submit a written Application Form.

6. All staff/volunteers shall be participants in a local church/ministry for a minimum of six months prior to the event.

7. All staff/volunteers shall participate in the required training program.

8. All staff/volunteers must be able to provide supervision to those 18 years and under in District or Conference events.

**Screening for Staff/Volunteers**

Careful screening is one way to provide for the safety of participants. Screening calls for a careful gathering and review of information in search of persons who can provide supervision in a safe environment. This includes an application, the performance of a National Screen, the submission of references and training. The
Conference Certification Authority must approve all screening procedures developed by individual conference/district ministry groups.

Training
Conference and district ministry groups shall be responsible for providing all training required by the Conference Certification Authority. That training shall include, but not be limited to, the following elements: recognizing the signs of abuse; avoiding situations when abuse might take place or conduct which could be perceived as abusive; and reporting requirements of the state of Missouri and the Missouri Conference of The United Methodist Church related to abuse and media response procedures.

Current Statement
Local Churches Use of Conference Training and Screening Process

Local churches may have their volunteers go through the Conference process for training and screening. The local church may include in their Safe Sanctuaries policy that their volunteers will go through the conference process. However, the designation of Conference Certification is specifically for District or Conference activities. Some applicants for Safe Sanctuaries may not be certified at the Conference level due to stricter conference requirements for supervision at District/Conference events. (Moved to No. 4 of the new statement) In these special circumstances, a letter of notification will be provided to the local church, stating, that these volunteers be considered for “Local Church activities only” after the local church evaluates how the applicant’s gifts and talents might be used at the local church level.

New Statement
Local Church and Conference Application, Training, Screening, and Certification Processes

1. There are two processes for certification, a Local Church Certification process and a Conference Certification process. The period of Certification for Local Churches using the online process and Conference Certification is four years.
2. An applicant’s gifts and talents will vary and meeting certification at the Local Church level does not mean that an applicant is automatically certified to attend District or Conference events.
3. The applicant must complete Conference level Certification in order to attend District or Conference level events.
4. The designation of Conference Certification is specifically for District or Conference activities because there are additional requirements for supervision at District/Conference events.
5. A local church shall not require Conference Certification as the means to meet Local Church Certification. A local church must use the Local Church Online Process or other local church “Live” process to meet the needs of Local Church Certification.
6. Each local church should establish its own Certification Authority for making certification decisions. Examples of who may be part of a Local Church Certification Authority include these possible positions; Director/Coordinator of Youth and Children ministries, the Pastor, or the Staff Parish Chair, and should consist of 3 – 4 members. The Local Church Certification Authority shall decide who is Certified, or Denied. The Local Church Certification Authority will be responsible for reviewing policies and procedures on an annual basis. It will keep records, maintain confidentiality, and ensure that training and screening requirements are met.
7. The applicants for Local Church or Conference Certification must be approved or authorized to complete the online or “live” certification application process by the Local Church Certification Authority.
8. Conference Certification requires a completion of Safe Sanctuaries training, an Application form, with self-disclosure questions, payment of a fee, authorizing of a National Screen and completion of references. The local churches will have the option to use a parallel or similar online process.
9. Conference Certification requires a completed file to be reviewed by the Conference Certification
Authority. The Conference Certification Authority will make the decision whether to approve or deny certification for the Conference level of certification. The Conference Certification Authority may also revoke or suspend a Conference Certification should it find that there is cause to do so.

10. The Local church process will use the Application form, the National Screen and the online training. References will be optional. It will be necessary for the local church to supplement the Conference training using their local church policies and procedures in order to complete the Local Church Certification.

11. Significant decisions of the Local Church Certification Authority, such as a denial or revocation will be entered into the Local Church Online Process and these decisions will be reported to the Conference Certification Authority for recording purposes.

12. Local church paid staff and other volunteers may need both Local Church Certification and Conference Certification, based on activity or event involvement.

Training and Screening Reciprocity

The Safe Sanctuaries Certification Authority may accept training provided by other United Methodist Conferences or United Methodist churches in other conferences after a review of the policies and procedures implemented in the other conference or church. Screening will be accepted provided that there has been a National Screen that included a national criminal check conducted by the other conference or church.

Conference Certification Authority

The Conference Certification Authority shall be responsible for reviewing and for giving approval for the procedures developed by individual conference and district ministry groups.

1. The Conference Certification Authority shall periodically review said procedures.

2. Where screening reports and/or forms are required, the Conference Certification Authority shall receive, review and maintain these reports. If any report raises a question about the suitability of the applicant or if there is less than adequate knowledge about the suitability of the prospective staff/volunteer, the Conference Certification Authority will notify the applicant and the pastoral/professional reference that it cannot grant certification. Where additional information is needed to complete the certification process, the Conference Certification Authority may request that a personal interview of the applicant be conducted by the person who completed the pastoral/professional reference. The interviewer will be requested to report on the results of the interview and to provide any written documentation which may support the results of the interview. If the Conference Certification Authority determines that the person may be unsuitable to serve, the application shall be disapproved and the applicant shall be notified that certification is denied. If such applicant is a clergy serving a United Methodist church, agency, or institution, notification will be made to the District Superintendent and the Bishop. If such applicant is a layperson, notification will be made to the person’s local church pastor. Information provided by references shall be kept confidential at all times.

3. Waiver of Right to Review - The applicant for Certification must acknowledge his or her understanding that by making an application for certification that they waive any right to inspect or copy any information which the Conference Certification Authority may use to make its determination. The Conference Certification Authority will only notify the applicant that Certification has been approved or disapproved, and it has no obligation to disclose to the applicant any of its reasons for the decision it makes, nor does the applicant have any right to learn the basis for the decision which the Conference Certification Authority makes. If the applicant is not willing to acknowledge this policy then the applicant may not continue with the application process.

4. Revocation - The Conference Certification Authority reserves the right to revoke an individual’s certification at any time. Any reported incident has the potential to cause revocation. Reports of incidents involving the safety, neglect and/or abuse, failure to supervise, and/or to provide for the emotional, psychological, physical, and sexual safety of a child, youth or vulnerable adult may
result in revocation of an individual’s certification.

Reporting of Incidents

Incidents may involve inappropriate behavior by staff/volunteers or other participants toward a participant and call for immediate on-site corrective action. Incidents may involve the abuse, neglect or exploitation of participants by staff/volunteers or other participants and mandate reporting through the Missouri Child Abuse Hotline (1-800-392-3738) or the Elder Abuse and Neglect hotline (1-800-392-0210).

A call to the Hotline is required to be made by staff/volunteers if there is reasonable cause to suspect that abuse of a participant has occurred. When the necessity of reporting occurs, the protection of children, youth, and vulnerable adults must be paramount. Cooperation with the Missouri Children’s Division, the Department of Health and Senior Services and law enforcement is required in all such incidents. In case of allegations of abuse, the District Superintendent and/or Bishop shall be notified immediately. The Conference Certification Authority will also be notified following notification of the appropriate state or local law enforcement authorities. Parents or legal guardians may be notified in appropriate circumstances.

Statement to the Media

The Conference Coordinator of Communications shall provide conference and district ministry groups with guidelines for communications with media about the incident(s) which may have been reported.

Guidelines for Procedures

Every ministry of the Missouri Annual Conference that relates to children, youth, and vulnerable adults in its programming or oversight, shall create procedures for implementing the conference policy. Administrative Teams who give oversight to these ministries shall be responsible for implementing and monitoring the compliance of said policy and related procedures.

1. Procedures shall address at a minimum:
   a. Reasonable safety measures in the selection and recruitment of workers for supervision of children, youth, and vulnerable adults;
   b. Educating said workers about the policy and procedures, along with ongoing monitoring so that compliance is maintained;
   c. Reporting incidents of child abuse or abuse of youth or vulnerable adults in accordance with the state Laws of Missouri and the written guidelines of the Missouri Conference;
   d. Dealing with the safety of those who may have been victimized;
   e. Active communication with family members and public media;
   f. A copy of the Conference procedures shall be retained in the Conference office

2. Every ministry shall be responsible for providing adequate liability coverage.

3. The Conference Certification Authority shall be responsible for training and resourcing the ministries covered by this policy.

4. Every church in the Missouri Annual Conference shall have an Abuse Prevention Policy for Children, Youth, and Vulnerable Adults with accompanying procedures. These policies and procedures shall include:
   a. Reasonable safety measures in the selection and recruitment of both employee and volunteer workers with children, youth, or vulnerable adults;
   b. Educating said workers of the policy and procedures along with ongoing monitoring so that compliance is maintained; and, using age appropriate languages in educating children, youth, and vulnerable adults of definitions of abuse and procedures for reporting;
   c. Reporting incidents of child abuse and abuse of vulnerable adults in accordance with the State Laws of Missouri, the written guidelines of the Missouri Annual Conference, and the written...
d. Providing for adequate liability insurance coverage;
e. Dealing with the safety, protection, and ongoing emotional support of those who may have been victimized;
f. Active communication with family members, the congregation, and the public media;
g. A copy of the policy shall be on file in the church’s District Office;
h. Administrative bodies of the local church shall be responsible for implementing and monitoring the policy and accompanying procedures.