

# Living Word United Methodist Church

## Safe Sanctuary Policy

### STATEMENT OF PURPOSE

We believe it is our duty as the Church to guard and protect the children, youth, and vulnerable adults given to our care. We want our congregation to be a place of safety, trust, and compassion: an embodiment of God's love for all. By doing all in our power to prevent abusive behavior, and responding appropriately to abuse when it does occur, we help God create a loving and just community. We strive to serve as a model for ethical standards in our community.

The purposes of this policy are

- To prevent physical, sexual, and emotional abuse of children (infant – 12 years), youth (13 – 17 years), and vulnerable adults (18 years and older unable to care for themselves or unable to protect themselves from harm or exploitation) within all church-sponsored activities and/or programs.
- To respond to abuse that comes to our attention – whether within the church or in church-sponsored programming – in ways that promote victim protection, strive to stop the abuse, and encourage healing for all involved.
- To create and maintain a safe environment for children, youth, and adults to engage in the church community.

The following methods will be the primary procedural areas addressed:

1. Safe staffing
2. Disclosures of abuse
3. Preventative education
4. Forms

Examples included within this policy are not considered exhaustive nor limiting all the programs, activities, and/or events that may be offered by, hosted at, or through which the church participates.

## 1. SAFE STAFFING

### 1.1 Minimum Age Standard for Supervision of Children and Youth

#### Policy

Minimum age standards allow persons to be separated from the supervised group by enough years to have perspective and to act as credible authority figures.

### Procedures

1. Minimum age standards require adult volunteers providing supervision for groups of children or youth must be at least four years older than the oldest members of the group.
2. The nursery must be staffed by two staff or volunteers, one of whom must be older than 21 years old.
3. This provision applies to activities and classes for children, youth, and vulnerable adults sponsored by the church, whether on site or elsewhere.
4. Staff and volunteers supervising these programs are responsible for enforcing this standard.

## 1.2 Standards for Adequate Supervision

### Policy

Adequate supervision is important to ensure that all are cared for and safety is upheld.

### Procedures

1. At least two adults must be present with any group of youth or children meeting at the church. If one adult must step away, the door must remain open and a designated floating supervisor (staff or volunteer) will be notified and will check in with the stationary supervisor from time to time.
2. We will commit to going in “3’s”: this includes one adult and two children/youth OR two adults and one child/youth.
3. Bathroom:
  - a. An adult will never be in a closed stall bathroom situation with a child. For our children that need assistance, there will be two adults taking the child or group to the bathroom and the door will remain open.
  - b. Depending on ability, most children in fourth grade and older can go to the bathroom alone. Leaders will use their best judgement as to if this is safe depending on the other groups in the building at the time. Living Word UMC recommends that a child not go to the bathroom alone, regardless of age.
  - c. Two children or youth should not go the bathroom together. There should be more than two children or youth, or just one if older.
4. Ratios

- a. On site – On Sunday mornings, or whenever other adults are in the building, the following minimum ratios are required and should be based on the youngest person in attendance:

<u>Persons Attending</u>	<u>Adult: Child Ratio</u>
Infants to 11 months	1 : 4
1 – 3 years	1 : 7
4 – 5 years	1 : 10
6 – 12 years	1 : 15
13 – 18 years	1 : 20

- b. When a group is alone in the church building, or meeting elsewhere, the following ratios are required and should be based on the youngest person in attendance:

<u>Persons Attending</u>	<u>Adult: Child Ratio</u>
Infants to 5 years	1 : 4
6 – 10 years	1 : 6
11 – 13 years	1 : 7
14 – 18 years	1 : 8

- c. Trips away from the church and overnight events at the church require a minimum of two adults, one of each gender, to provide for emergency needs.

5. Unforeseen circumstances may require exceptions. Exceptions to these procedures require written approval from a relevant staff member of the church.

### 1.3 Child Identification

#### Policy

Specialized check in and check out procedures are needed for our children.

#### Procedure

1. An adult register their child name and provides birthdate, contact information, the name of the person allowed to pick up the child, and allergy information. The adult must complete check in and receive a name badge sticker and a

guardian sticker (with the matching code) before they can leave the child in our care.

2. When an adult return for the child (birth - third grade), they give the guardian sticker to staff or volunteer at the door of the child's room. The staff or volunteer will match the tag to the child and release them to the adult.
3. Children fourth - sixth grades will be released to find their adult on their own. Their leader will remain in the room to help any children that need to return for assistance in locating their adult.

### 1.4 Designated Safety Officer

#### Policy

Living Word UMC will appoint a Designated Safety Officer (DSO).

#### Procedure

The DSO is responsible for various procedures in this policy such as:

1. Tracking background checks
2. Reviewing the Living Word UMC Safe Sanctuary policy with new volunteers and church staff
3. Supervision of the policy compliance
4. Act as a liaison to all groups and committees who work with and plan for children, youth, and vulnerable adult ministries

The DSO is trained on the most current Living Word UMC Safe Sanctuary policy and the Pacific Northwest Conference Safe Sanctuaries Guidelines. The DSO is expected to attend district and conference training sessions applicable to these policies. The DSO is a volunteer, non-staff person who is not involved with youth or children's activities at Living Word UMC. The DSO is a well-recognized "safe" person that members of the congregation can comfortably go to with concerns and reports of policy violations.

### 1.5 Screening of Volunteers and Paid Staff

#### Policy

Living Word UMC will screen all persons who work with children, youth, and vulnerable adults.

#### Procedure

The following steps apply to anyone who wishes to serve in a way that is likely to involve interactions with children, youth, and vulnerable adults.

1. Persons 18 years and older will be checked.
2. Relevant staff applications, disclosures, reports, and forms are retained as part of the employee file and are kept in the office.
3. Program staff and others making hiring decisions may have access only to information relevant to their decisions. Individuals may have access to their own information.

#### 1.5.1 Authorization Form and Background Checks

1. A person desiring to begin service at Living Word UMC shall complete the “Background Check Authorization” form. This form is available in the Living Word UMC office. All authorization forms are destroyed once the background check has been completed.

#### 1.5.2 Background Checks

1. Living Word UMC uses Ministry Safe for screening. This information may be used only in making decisions concerning employment or volunteer positions. Background check forms shall be submitted to Ministry Safe by the DSO. Background Check forms submitted to Ministry Safe upon completion and updated every 2 years thereafter. A record of dates of all background checks is maintained by Ministry Safe.
2. Upon receipt of a successful report, Ministry Safe will contact the employee or volunteer with direction to complete the Ministry Safe training video. A person may begin employment or volunteer service with a successful report but shall not supervise until the record of training completion is confirmed (see Section 3).
3. If convictions appear that were not disclosed by the applicant, an appropriate staff member must discuss them with the applicant before a decision is made about continued service. Convictions suggesting risk to those with whom the applicant would work shall constitute grounds for dismissal of employee or volunteer.

## 2. DISCLOSURES OF ABUSE

Physical, sexual or emotional abuse may come to the attention of church volunteers or staff in many ways.

## Policy

It is the policy of Living Word UMC to respond legally, ethically, and compassionately to all possible disclosures of physical, sexual, or emotional abuse of children and vulnerable adults. Other forms of abuse may be present with vulnerable adults, such as financial, and these are also addressed.

## Procedure

### 2.1 Receiving a Disclosure

1. Persons who are disclosed to or suspect abuse (based on verbal, behavioral, and/or physical indicators as highlighted in training) need to keep in mind that it is not up to them to determine the truth, nature or extent of the abuse.
2. Persons who receive a disclosure or suspect abuse are to respond calmly, provide safety, reassure the child/vulnerable adult, and ask only questions that address these needs (e.g., Is there something else you want to tell me? How can I help you feel safe? Thank you for telling me, you are not in trouble).
3. Persons who receive a disclosure or suspect abuse should never directly question the individual or seek details (e.g., Who did this to you? What was done to you?). It is not your job to determine if the abuse occurred, by whom, how, or when.
4. Persons who receive a disclosure or suspect abuse are referred to as the initial contact.

### 2.2 Reporting to Civil Authorities

1. The initial contact will immediately notify and consult with the appropriate church staff member (i.e., Director of Children's Ministries or Coordinator/Director of Youth Ministries), or if it involves the church staff member, the initial contact will notify the Lead Pastor. The staff member and/or Lead Pastor will notify the DSO of the report.
2. The initial contact along with the appropriate church staff member and DSO will immediately report the disclosed/suspected abuse to the appropriate civil authorities: the police, adult protective services, or child protective services.
3. The initial contact, church staff member, and DSO will complete the appropriate forms ("Safe Sanctuaries Incident Report" available in the church office or on the Pacific Northwest UMC website [information in Section 4]). The completed forms will be maintained in confidence in a secure place on the church property.

4. If the alleged offender(s) is a church member, volunteer, or staff member, the Lead Pastor will immediately inform them and remove them from all duties that involve contact with children, youth, and vulnerable adults.
5. If the alleged offender(s) is a pastor, the initial contact will inform the appropriate church staff member, the DSO, and the District Superintendent.
6. The State of Washington legally has “Permissive Reporting” for all state residents. Church staff and volunteers have a special responsibility for the children and vulnerable adults in their care. Individuals are protected when they make abuse reports in good faith.
7. Reports may be made anonymously to civil authorities; however, the initial contact must follow the rest of these procedures, beginning with contacting the Lead Pastor and/or appropriate church staff member.
8. If the alleged abuse occurred during a church event or on church property, the Lead Pastor, appropriate church staff member, and DSO will evaluate if additional safety measures are needed.

### 2.3 Further Considerations

1. There will be a designated person to handle all media requests/inquiries who is skilled and trained in media relations. Although all identities and facts are confidential, alleged abuse in church settings can receive media scrutiny.
2. The appropriate church staff member and/or Lead Pastor will update the District Superintendent regularly during this entire process.
3. If the alleged incident is unfounded (found not credible due to lack of evidence, age of alleged victim, too much time has passed, etc.), the appropriate church staff member, Lead Pastor, and DSO will determine if the alleged abuser may return to service. The same determination will be made regardless of whether Living Word UMC is informed of the outcome of the investigation.
4. Although the State of Washington does not mandate reporting as of the time of the update of this guideline, Living Word UMC recognizes that the reporting and investigation by authorities is imperative to protect children and vulnerable adults. Additionally, clergy who report or testify in the State of Washington are immune from liability by statutory law.
5. Living Word UMC further recognizes that Living Word UMC may be found criminally negligent for not reporting suspected or reported abuse of children, youth, and vulnerable adults.

## 3. PREVENTATIVE EDUCATION

### **Policy**

Preventive education shall be available to staff, volunteers, and interested church members.

### **Procedure**

Upon receipt of a successful background check report, a representative from Ministry Safe will contact the employee or volunteer with direction to complete the Ministry Safe awareness training video. The certificate of completion should be forwarded to the DSO. This video training must be completed by all staff and any volunteer who will work with children, youth, and vulnerable adults.

This training is available to any interested person in the congregation. A list of those who have received the training shall be maintained by Ministry Safe. Clergy, staff, and volunteers should encourage education of the entire church community about child abuse and other forms of sexual and physical abuse, prevention strategies, and the healing process for survivors, abusers, and their families.

## **4. FORMS and Contact Information**

### **Policy**

Living Word UMC will maintain a record of select forms, as appropriate. Ministry Safe will maintain records of background checks and training completion.

### **Procedure**

Forms will include the following and any future forms generated by this policy

- National Background Check Authorization (Ministry Safe)
- Safe Sanctuaries Incident Report (Living Word UMC)

Safe Sanctuaries incident report form is available in the church office or at <http://www.pnwumc.org/providing-a-safe-sanctuary/>

The Safe Sanctuary Policy and FAQ sheet is available in the church office or at the Living Word UMC website: <http://www.palabraviviente.net/>

PNW UMC Safe Sanctuaries guidelines are available in the church office or at the PNW UMC website: <http://www.pnwumc.org/providing-a-safe-sanctuary>

PNW UMC FAQs: <http://www.pnwumc.org/providing-a-safe-sanctuary/ministry-safe-faq/>



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<b>Contact</b>	<b>Website</b>	<b>Phone Number</b>
Everett Police Department	<a href="https://everettwa.gov/332/Police">https://everettwa.gov/332/Police</a>	(425)257-8400
PNW UMC District Superintendent	<a href="https://www.pnwumc.org/providing-a-safe-sanctuary/">https://www.pnwumc.org/providing-a-safe-sanctuary/</a>	(206)802-5871
Washington State Department of Children, Youth, and Families	<a href="https://www.dcyf.wa.gov/safety/report-abuse">https://www.dcyf.wa.gov/safety/report-abuse</a>	1-800-609-8764
Washington State Department of Social and Health Services - Adult Protective Services	<a href="https://www.dshs.wa.gov/altsa/report-concerns-involving-vulnerable-adults-phone">https://www.dshs.wa.gov/altsa/report-concerns-involving-vulnerable-adults-phone</a>	1-877-734-6277 (TTY) 1-800-977-5456