



Child, Youth and Vulnerable Adult Safety Policy

Approved October 23, 2018

SAFETY POLICY AT SAINT JOHN'S UNITED METHODIST CHURCH OVERVIEW

Step 1: We utilize Safe Gatherings as our comprehensive system that incorporates an online application, several levels of background checks, paperless reference checks, and online abuse prevention training.

Certification is valid for two years.



To get started: <https://safegatherings.com/app/registration>

Step 2: The Rio Texas 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 districts and local United Methodist Churches throughout our conference borders. Therefore, we will strive to create safe places for all of God's children. Our safety policy and procedures help us to do this holy and hard work.



As part of the Rio Texas Conference safety policy implementation plan all clergy, staff, and volunteers in ministry with children, youth and/or vulnerable adults must attend a Trusted con Confianza Certification training either online or in person every two years as part of their certification process. This online webinar provides the complete training via one 2-hour session.

https://riotexas.zoom.us/webinar/register/WN_qjDbS1XZTWeDoljzHM1rJg

CHILD, YOUTH & VULNERABLE ADULT SAFETY POLICY

MANDATORY STANDARDS FOR SAINT JOHN'S UMC

Church Council approved October 23, 2018

Reducing the Risk of Abuse in the Church

But let all who take refuge in you rejoice; let them ever sing for joy. Spread your protection over them, so that those who love your name may exult in you. (Psalm 5:11 (NRSV).

Call

In response to God's call to care for the vulnerable, Saint John's is committed to the well-being of every person entrusted to its care. This commitment is in harmony with the Book of Resolutions (¶162 Social Principles) and the baptismal covenant (United Methodist Hymnal).

Purpose

As part of the Rio Texas Conference, Saint John's is determined to provide an environment in which Participants (as defined herein) are safe from Neglect or Abuse. The scope of this policy and its provisions shall apply to all staff, volunteers, clergy, or lay persons in the Saint John's who have direct or indirect contact with Participants (Children, Youth, or Vulnerable Adults). This policy sets forth minimum mandatory requirements for screening and training of clergy, lay, staff, or volunteers. Implementation of mandatory ministry procedures and accountability action is required for all ministry leaders within the Saint John's and the Rio Texas Conference.

Commitment

In accordance with the Rio Texas Conference of the United Methodist Church Policy on Child, Youth, and Adult Safety, June 2017, Saint John's has adopted the following set of Safety Procedures to be implemented no later than the close of Annual Conference 2018. Copies of both documents can be obtained through the Saint John's office.

This safety policy meets or exceeds the requirements of the Rio Texas Conference of the United Methodist Church Policy on Child, Youth, and Vulnerable Adult Safety, June 2017 and has been reviewed and approved by the Saint John's Church Council and additionally the Trustees of each church. Any future revisions shall as a minimum meet or exceed the requirements of the Rio Texas Conference of the United Methodist Church Policy on Child, Youth, and Vulnerable Adult Safety, June 2017, and be reviewed and approved by the Saint John's Church Council and additionally the Trustees of each church.) before implementation.

Saint John's is fortunate to have persons with exceptional talent for teaching and supporting the spiritual nurture of our children and youth. We wish to encourage them to use their spiritual gifts. These safety procedures are for the well-being of our children, youth, and vulnerable adults participating in the ministries of Saint John's. We recognize that safety is an issue that involves the whole church family, not just those who work directly in ministry with children, youth, and vulnerable adults. Therefore, we are asking all of our church family to be informed and help us provide a safe environment for ministry.

Definitions

A. Abuse: is any deliberate act that inflicts bodily or emotional harm to a Participant. Abuse includes: (a) the infliction of physical or emotional injury by other than accidental means; (b) the creation of a risk, or allowing the creation of risk, to a Participant by other than accidental means; (c) committing or allowing to be committed an act of Sexual Abuse, Sexual Exploitation, or prostitution upon the Participant.

B. Adult Leader: is any person including any paid employee, volunteer, clergy, or lay person in the conference, district, or local church who has the responsibility for the care and Supervision of a Participant at an event. Adult Leaders shall no longer be in High School.

C. Applicant: is any person 18 years of age or older seeking to become an Adult Leader in a local church or for a district or conference event for children, youth and vulnerable adults.

D. Assistant Leader: is any person 16 years of age or older who has been through the application and safety certification process but does not qualify for a background check. These are still considered to be Participants and cannot fill the role of a mandatory Adult Leader.

E. Day Ministry Event: is an activity, or occasion sponsored by Saint John's that involves a gathering and care of Participants during the hours of 7:00am-10:00pm, and does not occur for more than four hours per day in duration of four or more consecutive days.

F. Exploitation: is obtaining or using another person's income, assets, or possessions with the intent to deprive the person of those resources.

G. Neglect: is failure to provide nutrition, medical, surgical, or any other care necessary for the well-being of the Participants.

H. Overnight/Extended Hour Ministry Event: a local church, conference, or district sponsored activity, or occasion that involves a gathering and care of Participants for more than four hours per day in duration of four consecutive days or involves an overnight stay.

I. Participant: is a Child, Youth, or Vulnerable Adult that is registered, enrolled, attending, or otherwise participating in an event or activity sponsored by Saint John's

1. **Child:** is any person 11 years of age or younger.

2. **Youth:** is a person 12-17 year of age.

3. **Adult Vulnerable:** persons over 18 years of age with physical, mental, and/or developmental disabilities and/or diminished physical capacity.

J. Prostitution: to engage in, to offer to engage, or to force a Participant to engage in sexual contact by either soliciting or receiving a fee or other benefit.

K. Rule of Three: The presence of two unrelated Adult Leaders at all ministry events involving Participants. Any engagement with a Participant requires the presence of two Adult Leaders.

L. Safety Policy Administrator: Your church may choose to identify a staff person, lay person, or committee/task force with the maintenance, implementation, and enforcement of your safety policy. Our Church Business Administrator is the person at Saint John's charged with the maintenance, implementation, and enforcement of the Saint John's Safety Policy. As the Safety Policy

Administrator, they may put together a team to help with this task, but he/she retains overall responsibility. The Safety Policy Administrator reports directly to the senior pastor.

M. Sexual Abuse: is any sexual contact, sexually explicit language, gestures, or images directed to a Participant.

N. Sexual Exploitation: is any deliberate act that allows or encourages a Participant to engage in an act of obscene or pornographic photography, filming, or depiction of a Participant as prohibited under Texas law.

O. Supervision: is the leadership role of a person who is in charge of a group of Participants, giving direction, setting boundaries, disciplining appropriately, maintaining safety and being the leader in all situations.

P. Vulnerable adult visitation: When conducting congregational care visits with vulnerable adults we will operate under the rule of three in visits with the opposite sex or in a home setting.

SAFE MINISTRY MANDATES

In accordance with the Rio Texas Conference Safety Policy Saint John's commits to provide adequate Supervision from Adult Leaders.

A. All ministry events with Participants shall follow the Rule of Three with a minimum of one Adult Leader for every eight Participants.

a. infants- 1:3

b. toddlers- 1:4

c. children- 1:6

d. Youth- 1:8

e. Youth, children and adults with Special needs: Saint John's will assign an adult or assistant leader appropriate to the level of assistance needed as determined by consultation with the individual/family. (This is in addition to the required 2 certified adult minimum.)

f. Vulnerable Adults: Ideally, in home visits we will have team of two when there is not another adult or care giver in the home. Opposite sex visits will always be conducted with at least two adult leaders. Hospital or rehab visits are acceptable for one adult leader when others in the facility are within reasonable distance and have full access to the vulnerable adult.

B. Any one-to-one mentoring or consulting:

1. Youth and Children: one-to-one mentoring shall be conducted in sight of another Adult Leader in an open space.

2. Adults: one-to-one mentoring and consulting shall be conducted in an open space or in an office with a windowed door.

C. Adult Leaders and Assistant Leaders working with children and youth must be at least five years older than the oldest Participants with whom they work. Children/youth less than 5 years age difference may serve as a helper supervised by at least 2 certified adults.

D. Assistant Leaders must work under the Supervision of two Adult Leaders.

E. Overnight Ministry Events

1. Co-ed Overnight Ministry Events require co-ed Adult Leaders.

2. Sleeping accommodations shall include sleeping distance of no less than three feet between Adult Leaders, Assistant Leaders, and Participants.
3. Every Participant shall have a completed medical release and parental/legal guardian permission form before they will be permitted to participate at any Overnight Ministry Event.

F. Travel

1. Only Adult Leaders will be permitted to drive Participants to ministry events. Drivers must:
 - a. Be between the ages of 25 to 75 years.
 - b. Have a valid driver's license
 - c. Show proof of insurance at the state's minimum limits
 - d. Do not be otherwise disqualified from driving (i.e., under medication, impaired, etc.).
 - e. Drivers must have the Safe Gatherings driver's license certification.
2. Written permission from a parent/legal guardian is required for events requiring transportation to and from the event location.
3. Traveling by car will require 2 adults to be present in every car organized by the church for ministry transportation. If you travel a longer than 6 hours we require 2 certified adults to switch drivers allowing the other to rest. For shorter trips if you are not able to have 2 certified adults in each vehicle, we will require persons to follow each other remaining in the other's eye sight.

G. Phone, video, and online communication (please see our separate policy under Social Media Safety Policy for further details about social media communication):

1. Adult Leaders must notify parents/legal guardians before requesting access, friending, texting, contacting a Participant via social media, or using any other form of online phone/video communication.
2. Using the Rule of Three, all group or social media communications must include two Adult Leaders who serve as administrators/moderators. All groups must be closed, private, and shall require the site administrator's approval to join.
3. Conversations via phone or text after 9:00 p.m. are for pastoral care concerns. For calls from children or youth the staff leader will immediately communicate with parents/guardian and appropriate staff associates. For vulnerable adults the staff member will communicate with caretaker or guardian.
4. Adult Leaders shall not photograph participants for use on internet or in print media without written permission of parent/legal guardian.

H. Restroom Procedure: Children five years of age and younger should use a classroom bathroom if one is available. If a classroom bathroom is not available, workers should escort a group of children to the hallway bathroom. They should always go in a group, never taking a child to the bathroom alone. The workers should check the bathroom first to make sure that it is empty, and then allow the

children inside. The workers should then remain outside the bathroom door and escort the children back to the classroom. If a child is taking longer than seems necessary, the worker should open the bathroom door and call the child's name. If a child requires assistance, the workers should prop open the bathroom door, and leave the stall door open as they assist the child.

For children over the age of five, at least one adult male should take boys to the restroom and at least one adult female should take girls. The worker should check the bathroom first to make sure that the bathroom is empty, and then allow the children inside. The worker should then remain outside the bathroom door and escort the children back to the classroom.

For the protection of all, workers should never be alone with a child in a bathroom with the door closed and never be in a closed bathroom stall with a child. Parents are strongly encouraged to have their children visit the bathroom prior to each class.

IMPLEMENTATION: SCREENING, TRAINING, AND ACCOUNTABILITY

A. SCREENING

1. Adult Leaders and Assistant Leaders will be invited and may be asked to complete an application.
2. Applicants should be an active member in the local church/ministry for a minimum of six months for youth ministry programs, one year minimum for children's ministry and three years minimum for congregational care ministers, prior to the event or provide additional references affirming their positive leadership with Participants in another ministry setting. In the case of new staff hires, references deemed adequate by the hiring supervisor will replace the six month waiting period. In the case of Adult Ministry Leaders or Assistant Leaders, previous ministry experience within the Rio Texas Conference may be transferred in lieu of the six-month waiting period pending approval of Rio Texas Conference office.
3. References shall be checked Safe Gatherings.
4. Adult Leaders shall:
 - a. Submit a signed authorization form for a criminal background screening, conducted by Safe Gatherings to be completed by the Rio Texas Conference office every two years. This will include a signed statement that they are not aware of any allegations that would prevent them from working with Participants.
 - b. If results of the screening raise questions about fitness of the Applicant, the Safe Gathering will notify the local church administrator. Results of criminal background screenings shall be kept confidential. Applicants can request that Safe Gatherings share the results of their criminal background screening with another district or local church in the Rio Texas Conference via a signed request authorization form.

B. TRAINING AND CERTIFICATION

All Adult Leaders and Assistant Leaders must be certified for their work at conference, district, and local church events. Certification includes:

1. Evaluation of and submission of the local church policy every year.
 - a. All Congregational Care Ministers (CCM) who regularly visit vulnerable adults are expected to attend quarterly training until they are certified. They will also meet with the Congregational

Care team and Pastor monthly. They will attend worship and engage in meaningful biblical study. They will maintain prescribed ethical and confidentiality standards.

- b. We will provide training on the Safety Policy annually and a copy of this policy will be given to new leaders/employees. Make-up training is available as needed.
- 2. Safety Policy will be reviewed annually and signed by certified adult leaders, assistance leaders, staff members and congregational care ministers.
- 3. Safe Gatherings Certification every two years. Certification will include the following modules:
 - a. Overview of Rio Texas Conference policy.
 - b. Abuse prevention.
 - c. Creating safe spaces, best practices for ministry, sexual ethics and appropriate leader behavior.
 - d. Overnight/extended hour ministry training.
 - e. The certification process will be designed by the Rio Texas Conference and will be offered by trained persons in every district.
- 4. Responsibilities of the Safety Policy Administrator:
 - a. The Safety Policy Administrator is responsible for maintaining an up-to-date list of qualified Adult Leaders showing the latest date of their qualification or recertification.
 - b. The Safety Policy Administrator shall ensure that each Adult Leader reviews the provisions of this Safety Policy at least annually.
 - c. The Safety Policy Administrator shall participate in the reporting of all allegations of abuse.

C. ACCOUNTABILITY

- 1. Every ministry of the Rio Texas Annual Conference, district, and local church shall have a policy that is compliant with the minimum standards of this Rio Texas Policy and must review their policy annually.
- 2. The Mission Vitality Center at the Rio Texas Conference office will work alongside district staff to ensure that policies are adopted and followed.
- 3. The Rio Texas Conference Uniting Table in consultation with the Conference Mission Vitality Center shall be responsible for reviewing and revising the Rio Texas Child, Youth and Vulnerable Adult Safety Policy.
- 4. Local churches shall submit their policy and a report on how they are in compliance with their policy annually to the District Superintendent at their charge or church conference.
- 5. Clergy shall document the date and facilitator when they complete safety certification to their District Superintendent annually via the annual inventory/clergy consultation form.
- 6. District staff will annually submit a report to the Mission Vitality Center and Office of Intergenerational Discipleship, identifying churches who are in compliance with this policy and/or those still in need of a policy or training.
- 7. The Mission Vitality Center will work with districts and local churches to keep track of and ensure all conference, district, and local church ministries are in compliance with this policy.

8. A copy of the conference procedures shall be retained in the Rio Texas Conference office.

REPORTING ABUSE Saint John's procedures for reporting Abuse are as follows:

- A. All reports of alleged Abuse should be documented in writing and brought immediately to the attention of pastors, appropriate ministry staff representative, and the state as Texas is a mandatory reporting state. Reports of Abuse, Neglect, Exploitation or Sexual Exploitation of Participants shall be made within 48 hours of suspicion to the Department of Family and Protective services through the Texas Abuse Hotline: 1-800-252-5400 or www.txabusehotline.org. Adult Leaders shall report all abuse by anyone- No Abuse should be considered trivial and not reported.
- B. Any Adult Leader or Assistant Leader accused of Abuse shall be immediately relieved of duties related to any conference, district, or local church event.
- C. In the case of Abuse allegations, the senior pastor, District Superintendent, and/or Bishop shall be notified immediately. Parents or legal guardians should be notified in appropriate circumstances.
- D. It shall be the goal to provide supportive care to both the victim and the accused and to restore such persons to wholeness. Saint John's shall provide a supportive atmosphere to all those who are affected, offering both objectivity and empathy as it seeks to create a climate in which healing can take place. Affected area (children, youth or vulnerable adults) staff member will consult with senior pastor in a timely manner to develop a care plan for all involved.
- E. Statement to the Media: All conduct with local media will be directed to church administrator in consultation with senior pastor and Rio Texas Conference leadership.