

Maple Avenue United Methodist Church
Marietta, Georgia

Safe Sanctuary Policy - Preventing Abuse in the Church

Approved by Church Council: November 4, 2019
Submitted to Charge Conference: November 17, 2019

Introduction:

Maple Avenue United Methodist Church (Maple Avenue UMC, Maple Avenue Church) believes that the spiritual, emotion and physical well being of our children, youth and vulnerable adults is imperative. We must do all we can to nurture and protect our children, youth and vulnerable adults. This policy is intended to provide a guide for that protection, as well as the protection of our adult workers and the church. This policy is enacted to insure that the parents, members, volunteers and staff of Maple Avenue UMC have a clear understanding of what the policies and procedures are regarding the safety of our children, youth and vulnerable adults. The leadership of Maple Avenue UMC requests the cooperation of all in our church, as they must abide by the guidelines of this policy.

Policy Standards and General Christian Moral Standard:

Staff and/or volunteers of Maple Avenue UMC who work in any area of the children and youth ministries and ministries with vulnerable adults that includes but is not limited to: Sunday School, preschool, sports, scouts, adult ministry trips, homebound visitations, etc., are required to adhere to these policies and standards as moral Christians. A signed covenant statement in support of this policy is required before a person may serve.

Supervision of the Safe Sanctuaries Policy:

The Pastor in Charge will appoint the person or committee (staff or volunteer) with the responsibility of the oversight of the Safe Sanctuary Policy. These policies govern all activities held by the church that involve children and youth under the age of 18, and/or any adult vulnerable adult (persons with a mental age of 18 years or less, or over the age of 65.)

These policies must be reviewed annually, reapproved by the Church Council (or Administrative Council) and presented at charge conference. These policies may be altered at any time with the approval of the Church Council (or Administrative Council) and the Trustees.

The following are basic procedures that Maple Avenue Church will follow to reduce the possibility of abuse.

The “Two Adult” Rule

The two adult rule requires that no fewer than two adults be present at all times during any church sponsored program, event or ministry involving children and youth. If this is impossible, “floaters” or “roamers” who move in and out of rooms will be assigned. To the best of our ability, the two adults will not be related.

The “Five-Years Older” Rule

Those who are paid or volunteer to work with children and youth will be at least five years older than those in the class or program. Those under age 18 may serve as “assistants” but not as lead workers or teachers.

Background Checks

Those paid or volunteer to work with children and youth must have a cleared background check or a signed affidavit on file before working with children or youth.

Classroom Windows:

All classrooms will have at least one window in the door, if possible. The window must **not** be covered at any time with decorations, etc. If a classroom has no window in the door, the door must remain open.

6 Month Hospitality Rule

No person who has not been a member of or a regularly participating visitor in the congregation for less than 6 months shall serve as a lead teacher or volunteer with children and youth.

Ratios

The responsible staff and volunteer committee should provide for the following adult to child ratios. 1:3 in preschool, 1:5 in elementary, 1:7 in junior high and 1:8 in senior high. Note: there must always be two adults present in any space where activities are taking place.

Open Door Counseling:

Any one-on-one counseling session with any person will be done with the door open. If at all possible, it should be done when another adult is nearby but not necessarily within hearing distance.

Transportation:

Transportation to and from activities held at the church is not the church’s responsibility. Church approved volunteers may provide transportation to and from activities held away from the church. Church approved volunteers must have a valid driver’s license and an insurance card on file in the Church office. All participants should carry information regarding: (a) current medical condition, including but not limited, medications, allergies, etc.; (b) current physician; (c) a copy of any Advance Directive signed by participant; and (d) contact person, in case of emergency. ***Remember, the contact person should not be on a trip.***

Outside Groups

Any outside groups or organizations meeting on Maple Avenue UMC grounds (inside and outside) must review and agree to comply with Maple Avenue UMC's safe sanctuary policies. These groups are responsible for securing the resources necessary to comply with these rules.

Training

Maple Avenue UMC will provide yearly training for all volunteers on the policies and procedures outlines above. Each new volunteer must complete formal Safe Sanctuaries training provided by the district, the local church, or on line through Trak-1. Records of those volunteers successfully completing training must be kept on file in the church office.

Vulnerable Adults:

While much of this policy addresses the need to protect our children and youth, Maple Avenue UMC recognizes that abuse of impaired and older adults is a major concern. Many older adults are also subject to financial abuse. We must be vigilant for signs of abuse in our adult membership and report any suspected abuse, following the process outlined below. The local Department of Family and Children Services has a division with responsibility for supervising elder care.

Reporting Abuse:

Maple Avenue UMC regards any form of abuse and evidence thereof as unacceptable and has a strict policy regarding the reporting of such abuse. This is a serious criminal allegation and will be taken seriously. As of January 2012, church volunteers are MANDATORY reporters. If a volunteer becomes aware of an abuse allegation, he or she must report it to the person responsible for the program **IMMEDIATELY**. If there is not a staff member on the grounds, then the Pastor in Charge should be contacted or his or her designee must be contacted. Do not hesitate to contact a staff member if you feel there is abuse occurring. For ALL allegations, a report MUST be made within 24 hours by the Reporter by phone to the Department of Family & Children's Services in the county of the victim's residence or to 1-800- CHILDREN. In the case of suspected elder abuse, make a report to 1-888-774-0152. A copy of the incident report must be turned into the Senior Pastor within twenty-four hours. If any further reporting is needed, the Senior Pastor and/or designee will handle the future reporting, including a report to the District Superintendent and law enforcement. Should the press or TV become involved, only an approved church spokesperson should respond. It is better not to make any response. DO NOT INTERVIEW THE VICTIM. Leave that process to the proper professional law enforcement officials, who are better qualified.

I have read the Safe Sanctuary Policy for Maple Avenue UMC and understand its contents. My signature below indicates my agreement and covenant to abide by the requirements set forth above.

Name (Print)

Signature

Date