

**AUSTIN SPRINGS  
UNITED METHODIST CHURCH**

**SAFE SANCTUARIES POLICY**

**AND**

**IMPLEMENTATION MANUAL**

*“With God’s help  
We will so order our lives after the example of Christ,  
That this child, surrounded by steadfast love,  
May be established in the faith,  
And confirmed and strengthened  
In the way that leads to life eternal.”*

*The Congregational Pledge to Baptized Children  
Taken from  
The United Methodist Hymnal, p. 44  
UMPH, 1989*

*(Revised May 2014)*

# AUSTIN SPRINGS UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

## SAFE SANCTUARIES POLICY

### OUR CALLING

Austin Springs United Methodist Church is a sacred place where God's people of all ages come together for worship, study, service and fellowship. The ministries of Austin Springs seek to share the Good News of the Gospel of Christ and make disciples of Jesus Christ, that all who enter may come to know God and experience the love of Christ.

### OUR MANDATE

According to the Tennessee Department of Children's Services, more than 49,000 children per year in the State of Tennessee are reported to be abused or neglected. Approximately 50 percent of these children were alleged to be physically or sexually abused.

In 1996, the General Conference of the United Methodist Church adopted a resolution aimed at reducing the risk of child sexual abuse in the church. The Holston Conference of the United Methodist Church issued a mandate that all churches shall implement a plan to prevent child abuse by Charge Conference 2005.

### OUR PURPOSE

The purpose of this document is to ensure that the members and staff of Austin Springs United Methodist Church do all they can to provide a safe and secure environment for nursery, preschoolers, children, youth, and all persons entrusted to our care. The following policies and procedures are for the protection of our children, youth, employees, volunteers and our entire church family at Austin Springs United Methodist Church, Johnson City, Tennessee. By establishing these policies and procedures, we demonstrate our commitment to provide a safe environment for our children and youth as they grow in their relationship with God. We believe it is possible for us to greatly reduce the risk of abuse by following these procedures.

### OUR COVENANT

Therefore, as a Christian community of faith and a United Methodist congregation, we pledge to conduct the ministry of Jesus Christ in ways that assure the safety of our children and youth, as well as of the workers with children and youth. We will follow reasonable safety measures in the selection and recruitment of workers; we will implement prudential operating procedures in our ministries; we will educate our workers with children and youth regarding the use of appropriate procedures; we will have a clearly defined procedure for reporting a suspected incident of abuse that conforms to the requirements of the laws of the State of Tennessee; and we will be prepared to respond should such an incident occur.

In all our ministries with Children and Youth, this congregation is committed to demonstrating the love of Jesus Christ so that each child will be "surrounded by steadfast love.... Established in the faith... and confirmed and strengthened in the way that leads to life eternal." (*Baptismal Covenant II, The United Methodist Hymnal, p. 44*).

# AUSTIN SPRINGS UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

## SAFE SANCTUARIES

### IMPLEMENTATION MANUAL

#### **DEFINITIONS**

Children – Persons Birth – Grade 6

Youth – Persons attending Grades 7 - 12

Adults – Persons over 23 Years of Age\*

*\*While persons are legally considered an adult at age 18, to encourage adherence to the 5-year rule, Austin Springs Safe Sanctuaries requires that “adults” be over 23 years of age.*

Intern/Assistant – Persons employed temporarily to assist with special ministry areas

#### **GENERAL PROCEDURES**

1. Austin Springs Safe Sanctuaries policy will be approved by the Church Council and available to all church members.
  - a. Staff and Volunteers with children and youth will receive a copy of Austin Springs Safe Sanctuaries Policy.
  - b. Parents will receive a copy of the Safe Sanctuaries Policy when their child first attends Austin Springs UMC.
  - c. The Safe Sanctuary Policy will be included in our new member packets, available for pick-up in the church information area, and available online at <http://www.findingourwayhome.net/>.
  - d. The Austin Springs Safe Sanctuaries Policy and Implementation Manual will be reviewed annually by a the Church Council.
2. Volunteers with Children and Youth will be offered training in regard to the implementation of that policy. At the training, all participants will be required to authorize Austin Springs UMC to complete a background check and to sign a Safe Sanctuaries participation covenant.
3. Facility doors will be locked when not in use, including closets, electrical rooms, and any cabinet where chemicals/cleaners are stored. The Pavilion will be locked when not in use, including kitchen and restrooms.
4. Facility exit doors will be marked by illuminated EXIT signs and will remain clear of any items that would impede evacuation in case of an emergency. Emergency lighting will be installed and in working order ensure easy evacuation in the event of power failure. Emergency lighting will be in, but not limited to, the fellowship hall, sanctuary, and hallways. Working and maintained fire extinguishers will be in, but not limited to, two at front of sanctuary, one in the pastor’s office, one in upstairs classroom hallway, two in fellowship hall kitchen, and one in pavilion kitchen. The Trustees Committee Chair will ensure that the emergency lighting and all fire extinguishers are checked on a monthly basis and a log is maintained. The Trustees Committee Chair will also ensure there is an emergency response plan developed, church leadership trained on the plan, and at least on an annual basis an emergency response drill conducted.

5. Staff, leaders and other volunteers will know the location of emergency aid kits and have telephone access for emergency medical assistance.
  - a. Local access telephones are available in the Pastor's Office, Library, and the Kitchen downstairs in the Fellowship Hall.
  - b. First Aid kits will be made available in the library, the Fellowship Hall, and in the kitchen in the Pavilion. The Trustee Committee Chair will ensure First Aid kits are checked monthly to ensure they are properly supplied and any expired supplies are removed and replaced. A log will be maintained to verify maintenance checks.
6. No fewer than two leaders will be present at all events where children, youth, and vulnerable adults will be participating, on or off campus. At least one leader present will be an adult, 23 years of age or older, who has been an active part of Austin Springs UMC for six months or longer, has authorized a background check and has been trained in Safe Sanctuaries policies and procedures.
  - a. When it is not feasible to have 2 leaders in every room, such as when a large group has divided into smaller groups, doors will remain open and a floater will check on each group.
  - b. All teachers and leaders are strongly encouraged to avoid being alone with a minor or vulnerable adult.
  - c. For overnight events, at least two adults of each gender will be present. At single-gender overnight events, at least two or more adults present will be of the same gender as the participating children/youth/ vulnerable adults.
7. Volunteers who serve as teachers and leaders of children and youth will be at least five years older than the oldest person they are teaching or leading.
8. Volunteers and staff who work with minors and vulnerable adults will be required to submit to a background check.
  - a. Volunteers and Staff submitting to a background check must complete an authorization form available in the church office. This form will be supplied to all persons completing Safe Sanctuaries training. Authorization forms should be turned in the Pastor for submission.
  - b. Background checks for Austin Springs' employees and volunteers will be paid for through the church budget. Background checks for volunteers for other organizations are the responsibility of that organization.
  - c. Only the Eligibility Review Panel (consisting of the Pastor(s), the Background Check Coordinator, and Church Council Chair) will see the results of the background checks and determine the eligibility of persons to work with minors and vulnerable adults. Ideally, there would be a consensus decision made by the Eligibility Review Panel for each applicant. However, in all circumstances the Pastor(s) will be the final authority in determining a person's eligibility to work with minors and vulnerable adults.
  - d. If an individual has a concern about a decision made about their eligibility or if another church member or guest has a concern about a person's appropriateness to work with minors and vulnerable adults.
  - e. Other Ministry Team members will receive a list of persons who have been approved for service with children and youth.
  - f. All background checks will be kept confidential. Files from background checks will be kept in a locked cabinet with other personnel files in the Pastor's office.
  - g. Background checks must be renewed every 5 years.
  - h. Persons who have resided in Tennessee less than 3 years will have a background check in their previous state of residence.

- i. Persons who are found to represent a potential threat of committing abuse or violating this policy will not be allowed to serve as teachers, leaders or helpers with children and youth.
9. A minimum ratio of 1 adult volunteer worker per 10 children/youth/ vulnerable adults will be maintained in each situation involving the supervision of children and youth.
10. Austin Springs UMC is responsible for each child/youth in attendance at an event from the beginning to the end of the event, in the location that the event occurs. Parents must be attentive to sign-in procedures.
  - a. Children may not leave prior to the ending of an event without prior notice from a parent.
  - b. Children will only be released to persons other than parents if prior contact has occurred between the parents and the staff person in charge.
  - c. Austin Springs UMC is not responsible for children/youth who are not signed in to an event.
11. Permission forms will be required for each off-campus event involving children and youth.
12. All Facebook/social media groups and pages associated with Preschool, Children's or Youth ministry areas will be designated as "closed" groups, requiring all those who wish to gain access to be approved by the page administrators.

All church-related Facebook groups and pages must have at least two administrators. If an administrator is no longer associated with the ministry, that individual's administrative status must be revoked.

Photos may be posted to the Facebook/social media page by page administrators. Photos must not be tagged with name or location indicators. Parents must be given the opportunity to opt out of this to prohibit posting. All photos must be appropriate and within the spirit of the mission of our ministry. Photos used in other mediums such as church newsletters, websites, blogs, etc. must not include any identifying information of minors. Individuals (including minors) are welcome to identify ("tag") themselves. We discourage youth and adults from taking and posting photos of children participating in church events on all personal social media sites. When checking in on Foursquare, Facebook or any location tagging social media, only check on yourself. Never check in minors. Be sensitive to tagging or revealing other participants' location without their expressed permission.

In the case of clergy and member online connections, Friend requests (et al) should be initiated by the member, especially if the member is a minor or vulnerable adult.

13. No photographs or videos of children are to be taken by church staff or leaders without signature authorization given by the child's parent/legal guardian. If the child is in the custody of The Tennessee Department of Children's Services, only The Tennessee Department of Children's Services can authorize any photographs or video. Foster parents are not authorized to sign to allow photographs or video to be taken.
14. All outside organizations that use the church facility or church grounds will abide by Austin Springs Safe Sanctuaries policies and procedures. Such organizations will be asked to sign a covenant that they have read and agree to abide by Austin Springs Safe Sanctuaries policies and procedures.
15. Classroom windows may not be covered when rooms are in use by children or youth.

16. Parents or other adults who bring children to Austin Springs are encouraged to remain on the property while their children are signed into Austin Springs' ministries. Persons who leave the property while the children for whom they are responsible are signed into classes or events will provide emergency contact information
17. Liability insurance coverage: Austin Springs Trustees shall maintain liability insurance coverage of at least \$1,000,000 per event/\$3,000,000 aggregate for activities both on and off church property. Liability insurance should include at least \$300,000 coverage for sexual misconduct claims.

### **PROCEDURES FOR REPORTING INCIDENTS OF ABUSE**

1. According to the laws of the State of Tennessee, all persons are mandatory reporters of child abuse. If a person learns of or witnesses an instance of abuse, that person shall immediately report the alleged incident of abuse or suspected abuse to the appropriate county or state authorities. The telephone number for reporting incidents in the State of Tennessee is 1-887-237-0004.
2. Incidents of abuse or reasonably suspected incidents of abuse of children or youth will also be reported as soon as possible to the Senior Pastor or another Austin Springs Ministry Team member. In the case that the pastor is the person accused, the incident should be reported to the Johnson City District Superintendent of the United Methodist Church at (423) 926-7533.
3. The person reporting the incident will document, in writing, all known facts and circumstances and will also make a report that documents all steps taken in the course of handling the reported incident.
4. The pastor and/or staff member will document all actions taken in reporting the incident of abuse using the appropriate forms.
5. The confidentiality of all persons involved will be safeguarded.

### **RESPONDING TO ALLEGATIONS OF ABUSE**

1. Every allegation will be taken seriously. Adequate care and respect must be offered to the alleged victims and alleged perpetrators until the allegation can be substantiated or cleared.
2. The safety and security of the alleged victim must be safeguarded before the person accused of abuse is confronted.
3. The parents/guardians of the suspected victim will be notified immediately, unless the parents/guardians are the alleged perpetrators.
4. All procedures listed in the previous section on Reporting will be strictly followed.
5. All records relating to the matter will be maintained in confidential files.
6. All efforts in handling the situation will be carefully documented.
7. The Senior Pastor or his/her designee will notify the liability insurer and the legal counsel for the Church about the alleged incident.
8. The Senior Pastor will be the sole spokesperson for Austin Springs United Methodist Church and the District Superintendent will be the sole spokesperson for the district insofar as media inquiries are concerned.
9. Any person accused must be treated with dignity and support. That person will be immediately relieved of further responsibilities, as circumstances dictate, until the allegations are cleared or substantiated.