

Orange UMC Safe Sanctuaries Policy

The purpose of the Orange UMC Safe Sanctuaries policy is to put forward a set of best practices in order to provide safe ministry contexts for everyone involved. Safety—physical, emotional, and spiritual—is essential for genuine growth. This safety must be extended to participants, leaders, and the church as a body. We also recognize that some people, particularly minors and adults with physical and mental disabilities, are more vulnerable than others. Therefore, this policy will pay special attention to those populations.

No policy can address every situation adequately. There are times that details of a policy must be extended or even broken for the sake of true safety or impactful ministry. All leaders should do their absolute best to uphold the practices set forth here, but must use their own wisdom and discernment to put the safety of others first, even before the letters of this policy.

Glossary of Terms

Minor- Anyone under the age of 18. Youth who are 18 years old but still in high school shall also be considered minors for the purposes of this policy.

Vulnerable Adult- Anyone who is over 18, but may be more vulnerable to abuse or neglect due to physical or mental disabilities.

Adult Volunteer- An adult helping with an event who has not fulfilled the requirements of the Safe Sanctuaries policy.

Approved Adult- An adult helping with an event who has fulfilled the requirements of the Safe Sanctuaries policy.

Youth Volunteer- A student in grade 6-12 volunteering for an event with younger minors. They cannot be considered an Approved Adult and do not satisfy the “Two Deep Rule.”

Physical Abuse- Violent non-accidental contact which results in injury. This includes, but is not limited to, striking, biting, or shaking. Injuries include bruises, fractures, cuts, and burns.

Sexual Abuse- Any form of sexual activity or viewing of sexual images between an adult and a minor, even if consensual.

Emotional Abuse- A pattern of intentional conduct which harms self-esteem through rejection, threats, terrorizing, isolating, or belittling.

Neglect- Failure to provide for basic needs like food, clothing, shelter, and medical care, and can also include withholding emotional needs. Failure to provide supervision or direct care that puts the minor’s health and safety at risk.

Public Spaces- Areas in which witnesses may reasonably be expected to be present. This includes restaurants, stores, open public spaces (parks), the Fellowship Hall during business hours, and classrooms with doors open on a Sunday morning.

Private Spaces- Areas in which witnesses cannot reasonably be expected to be present. This includes residences, vehicles, classrooms with doors shut, or isolated outdoor areas.

The Laws of North Carolina

The laws of North Carolina and Orange County supersede this policy. One of the most applicable laws in the context of church ministry is [§ 7B-301](#). It can be summarized as such: If you have reason to suspect that a minor has been abused or neglected, you are legally obligated to report the situation to the department of social services. This can be done via telephone (919-245-2818 during business hours; 919-732-5063 after hours) or in person.

Responding to Abuse and Neglect

In addition to what is required by law, if any person suspects that a minor is being neglected or abused, the following steps should be taken:

- An incident report form should be completed as soon as possible, but must be completed within 24 hours. Incident report forms can be found in the mailboxes in the hallway behind the main office or from any staff member.
- Report the incident to the Senior Pastor. If the alleged offender is the Senior Pastor or the Senior Pastor is unavailable, the incident must be reported to the District Superintendent.
- The Senior Pastor or designee must then notify the District Superintendent, church legal counsel, the insurance administrator, and the head of the ministry area in which the suspected abuse occurred.
- The alleged offender shall be immediately removed from working with minors and vulnerable adults pending outcome of investigation by the appropriate authorities.
- If it is determined that a charge of abuse or neglect is unsubstantiated, the original copy of the Incident Report is to be secured in the Financial Secretary's locked files. All other copies are to be destroyed. All information is sensitive and confidential and should be handled as such. If new evidence is uncovered at a later date, the case will be rereported.

Response Team

When notified of a suspected incident of abuse or neglect or a serious violation of the OUMC Safe Sanctuary Policy, the Senior Pastor will convene a Response Team to ensure that Safe Sanctuary policies were adhered to. The team shall be composed of:

- A Licensed Social Worker, Psychologist, Psychiatrist or other Physician with experience in child abuse
- The Chair of Staff Parish Relations Committee
- The Chair of Trustees
- An Attorney
- A Media Liaison
- A representative from Children or Youth Ministries
- The staff person responsible for the ministry area associated with the incident
- Senior Pastor

The Senior Pastor will ensure that the Response Team meets within one week after the incident is reported. In the event one of the Response Team members is an alleged offender, a substitution will be made.

The Response Team will review the Incident Report and recommend a plan to address the following:

- Determine adherence to the Safe Sanctuary policy
- Needs of the victim and the victim's family
- Needs of the church
- Requirements of government authorities
- Needs of the alleged offender
- Recommended changes to procedures

The Response Team will subsequently present a written report of the church's plan to the District Superintendent. Records pertaining to the incident will be kept by the Financial Secretary in a secure confidential file. Only the Financial Secretary will have access to these files.

Selection and Screening of Staff and Volunteers

All staff and any adults who regularly volunteer for OUMC sponsored activities with minors or vulnerable adults, or outside organizations using OUMC facilities with minors or vulnerable adults, must fulfill the following requirements:

- Be 18 years old or older.
- Attend OUMC regularly for a minimum of 6 months.
 - o Does not apply to staff or outside organizations
- Complete a background check release form.
 - o Background checks will be completed by the Financial Secretary.
 - Results will be kept in a locked file for 5 years after employment or volunteering is complete.
 - Background checks must be completed every 5 years.

- If the background check is clear, the applicant will be marked as having completed the background check in Realm.
- If the background check returns with suspicious history or other potential risks, the Financial Secretary will inform the Senior Pastor and the staff person responsible for the ministry area. They will decide whether the applicant may be approved for volunteering with minors and/or vulnerable adults.
- Complete an annual Safe Sanctuaries training.
 - New volunteers and staff members must be trained for the first time in person. Subsequent trainings may be completed online.
 - Trainings must be administered by a staff member or his/her delegate.
 - Trainings should include:
 - What to do when abuse or neglect is suspected
 - What to do when Safe Sanctuaries is being violated, but abuse or neglect is not
 - Recognition of abuse and neglect
 - Incident Reports
 - Rules for Adult Volunteers, Approved Adults, and Youth Volunteers
 - A signed statement that they have read, understand, and agree to abide by the Safe Sanctuaries Policy.

All Youth Volunteers must:

- Complete an annual Safe Sanctuaries training as outlined above

All volunteers working with minors and/or vulnerable adults are approved at the discretion of the staff person responsible for the ministry area and, ultimately, the Senior Pastor.

The staff person responsible for the ministry area is responsible for making sure all volunteers have fulfilled the above requirements.

Registered Sex Offenders

Registered Sex Offenders (hereinafter “Registered Adult”) may not be volunteers for activities involving minors or vulnerable adults. Furthermore, due to the location of the preschool and playground, and in accordance with [G.S. § 14-208.18](#), registered adults who have committed certain types of offenses may not be legally allowed on church premises. For registered adults who do not fall under the restrictions of G.S. § 14-208.18 but wish to participate in the activities of the church, a covenant must be established between the registered adult and the church. The covenant should be signed by the Senior Pastor, Chair of SPRC, staff members responsible for ministries involving minors or vulnerable adults, and the registered adult. This covenant must include:

1. Statement of Grace- God’s grace is powerful and redeeming for all. We also believe that for spiritual growth, all people must feel safe and protected. This includes protecting the vulnerable from harm and the registered adult from false accusations.

2. Terms of Participation
 - The registered adult will not accept any leadership or representational position within or on behalf of the church.
 - The registered adult will have covenant partners who are approved adults not related to registered adult. A covenant partner must be present to be on the grounds of the church.
 - There should be NO relationship with a minor or vulnerable adult.
3. Parole Officer- The Senior Pastor must have written permission to talk with the parole officer whenever he/she deems necessary.
4. Annual Renewal- The covenant will last for no more than one year at a time.
5. New Congregation – If the registered adult leaves the church and transfers to another church then the new church will be notified.
6. Any other terms deemed necessary for the safety and well-being of the church and the registered adult.

Safe Sanctuary Rules

1. All activities involving minors or vulnerable adults must be supervised by at least one approved adult.
 - a. The Two Deep Rule: In private spaces, all activities involving minors or vulnerable adults must be supervised by at least two adults who are not related, one of whom must be an approved adult.
 - i. All OUMC classrooms and offices must have doors with windows or half-doors.
 - b. Youth volunteers may assist approved adults but do not count toward the Two Deep Rule.
 - c. When it is necessary for an approved adult to work with a minor or vulnerable adult one-on-one, as with counseling or assisting with changing clothes, the door must be cracked open with others nearby.
 - d. All adult volunteers must be 5 years older than the oldest minor participating in the activity.
 - e. Adult volunteers and approved adults may not give gifts to minors without first informing his or her parents or legal guardian.
2. Nursery, Preschool, and Childcare Rules
 - a. All children must be signed in and signed out by a parent or legal guardian. If parent/guardian wishes for a different adult to sign out their child, this must be obtained in writing.
 - b. Disposable latex (or similar) gloves must be worn during diapering.
 - i. If gloves are not available, the caregiver must wash his/her hands with soap and water before and after diapering.
 - c. Potty trained children who need help will be accompanied to the restroom by an approved adult with the door propped open and others in the vicinity.

- d. During committee meetings and small groups, a youth volunteer may provide childcare in a public area for up to 5 children without an approved adult being needed.
3. Transportation Rules
- a. Vehicles are considered private spaces and thus must satisfy the Two Deep Rule.
 - i. Exception: For some events in which an adult is transporting more than two minors for ministry purposes (Camp Chestnut Ridge, Catching Fire, etc) and having a second adult is impractical, a permission form can be used in place of a second adult.
 - b. Drivers of the church vans must be approved adults age 23 or older.
 - c. Minors may not transport other minors for church activities unless they are related.
 - d. Drivers may not operate cell phones while driving, except for navigation and emergency phone calls. They may not text while driving.
4. Off-Campus and Overnight Activities- Trips and retreat settings often provide unique settings and circumstances that cannot always be controlled. Trip leaders should do their best to follow all of the following rules, while using their wisdom and discernment to apply them to the needs of a given occasion.
- a. Written permission, as well as a medical emergency form, must be obtained for any off-campus or overnight activities involving minors.
 - b. All overnight trips must include two unrelated approved adults.
 - i. There must be at least one approved adult of each gender represented by the minors attending the activity.
 - c. Room Assignments
 - i. In hotel-style settings, adults and minors must be in separate rooms, unless related.
 - ii. In public sleeping settings, the two deep rule applies.
 - d. All participants, minors and adults, must change clothes in private if physically capable. Minors and vulnerable adults requiring assistance in changing should follow the one-on-one “counseling” guidelines.
5. Technology Rules
- a. Exposing minors to pornography is sexual abuse.
 - b. Accessing pornography while on church property or using church-provided devices will not be tolerated.
 - c. Social media and texting are powerful tools for ministering to minors, but provide unique risks. Adults must use discretion when communicating privately with youth. Any lengthy online conversations should be disclosed to the minor’s parents. Counseling through text messaging should be avoided if at all possible.
 - d. Parents/Guardians of minors should be provided a waiver in which they may choose for images of their child not to be included on any social media or internet posts.
6. Injuries

- a. Injuries requiring medical treatment are to be reported to a parent/legal guardian as soon as possible and within 4 hours of occurrence. An Incident Report must be completed and kept in a confidential file for 5 years minimum.

Exceptions

Ministry is messy and no policy is perfect. If a staff member responsible for a ministry area involving minors or vulnerable adults believes an exception should be made for the sake of a ministry and time permits, they may apply for an exception, which is to be approved by the Senior Pastor, a second ministry staff member, and the chair of trustees. If time constraints require a decision to be made immediately, it is understood that staff members may act without prior approval of the Senior Pastor.

Reporting Violations of Safe Sanctuary Rules That Do Not Include Suspected Abuse

For this Safe Sanctuary Policy to be effective, it must be a team effort. We must together pledge to uphold it, and we also must keep one another accountable. For minor infractions, remind the person of the policy and encourage them to make changes as necessary. For repeat infractions or violation of serious policy rules, the following steps should be taken:

- An incident form should be completed as soon as possible.
- Report the incident to the Senior Pastor or designee. If the alleged offender is the Senior Pastor, the incident must be reported to SPRC.
- The Senior Pastor must then notify the head of the ministry area in which the suspected abuse occurred.
- While respecting the rights and reputation of the alleged offender, the Senior Pastor (or District Superintendent as appropriate) will confront the alleged offender regarding the suspected violation of the Policy. If deemed necessary, the alleged offender will be removed immediately from working with children and youth pending final resolution of the matter.

Inclusion Statement

Orange UMC believes all people are beloved children of God. We are committed to providing an environment that is free from discrimination and harassment based on race, age, creed, color, religion, national origin or ancestry, sex, disability, sexual orientation, genetics, gender identity or expression. OUMC is fully devoted to inclusiveness in order to offer community and opportunities for spiritual growth to all people while complying with all Federal and North Carolina State laws, regulations, and executive orders regarding non-discrimination and affirmative action.

Revisions and Updates

This policy shall be reviewed on an annual basis. Any revisions must be approved by church council.

Appendices

Incident Report Form

Application to Volunteer with Minors or Vulnerable Adults

Photo Release Exemption for Minors