



# Safer Sanctuaries Policy for the Protection of Children, Youth, and Vulnerable Adults

Revised and Approved by the Common Table for Church Vitality: September 19, 2024

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## **Safer Sanctuaries Policy for the Protection of Children, Youth, and Vulnerable Adults**

### **A. Theology, Background, and Opportunity for Ministry**

Jesus Christ calls the church to establish and maintain a nurturing, loving, safe and secure Christian environment for all:

*“A new commandment I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another.” - John 13:34 (NIV)*

Working intentionally and publicly to create safer sanctuaries communicates to our members, visitors, and our community that we, the people called United Methodists, prioritize the protection of the vulnerable in our midst. In Proverbs 31:8, God calls us to “speak out on behalf of the voiceless, and for the rights of all who are vulnerable.” The Virginia Conference of the United Methodist Church (the “Conference”) has zero tolerance of the exploitation and abuse of children, youth and vulnerable adults. God values human life, intending all people to have worth and dignity in all relationships with God and others. As Methodists, we are called to work for justice for those whose voices are devalued, silenced or ignored.

At baptism, Methodist congregations commit to “surround [the person being baptized] with a community of love and forgiveness, that they may grow in their trust of God and be found faithful in their service to others” (The Baptismal Covenant II, *United Methodist Hymnal*). This covenant to provide support and assistance to our children, youth, and vulnerable adults is a sacred responsibility.

### **1. Purpose of the Safer Sanctuaries Policy**

Welcoming children, youth, and vulnerable adults to an environment intentionally designed to protect these individuals is a practice of Christian hospitality and an opportunity for ministry with these vulnerable population. Children and youth are those aged 17 and under, and vulnerable adults are those aged 18 or over whose disabilities (mental or other) and/or health conditions result in the need for personal assistance, supervision, and/or other community care services. Conference boards, agencies, and commissions (collectively “Conference Entities”) must ensure the highest attention to and protection of the vulnerable in connection with Conference ministries and events that include children, youth, and vulnerable adults. While it is not possible to entirely eliminate risks of child exploitation and abuse, careful management can identify, mitigate, manage or reduce risk of harm through the establishment of and adherence to reasonable policies and procedures.

Resolution 3084, “Reducing the Risk of Child Sexual Abuse in the Church,” and Resolution 8014, “Church Participation by a Registered Child Sex Offender,” (*2012 Book of Resolutions of the United Methodist Church*, p. 240 and p. 900 respectively) provide guidance to the local church and annual conference in how to make our churches safer places that protect children and other vulnerable persons from abuse.

This “Safer Sanctuaries Policy for the Protection of Children, Youth, and Vulnerable Adults” (hereinafter the “Policy”), which must be followed by all Conference Entities, implements practices to:

- a) maximize safety and prevent child abuse and neglect from occurring within our church community,
- b) establish procedures to reduce the risk of physical, emotional, and sexual abuse of our children, youth, and vulnerable adults as they participate in Conference events;
- c) provide training resources to adults who have a formal role in working with or supporting children, youth and vulnerable adults;
- d) send a clear message that child exploitation and abuse is not tolerated and leads to disciplinary sanctions and criminal penalties;
- e) permit the application of procedural fairness when making decisions while responding to concerns or allegations of child exploitation and abuse.
- f) promote accountability because the Policy applies to all staff and volunteers, clergy or lay, who have contact with or responsibility for children, youth, and/or vulnerable adults at Conference sponsored events.

## **2. Clergy Responsibilities**

- a) Clergy are **required by law** to report abuse/neglect or suspected abuse/neglect.
- b) Both legally and in their obligations to the denomination and to God, clergy and religious professionals have a responsibility to those in their congregations and broader community, especially those whose voice is compromised by age, ability level, and/or abuse or neglect.
- c) For clergy and religious professionals serving on conference boards and agencies, their responsibility extends to those participating in board or agency-sponsored ministries.
- d) The 2004 General Conference initially took note of this responsibility when they adopted the following statement:

“All clergy of The United Methodist Church are charged to maintain all confidences inviolate, including confessional confidences, except in the cases of suspected child abuse or neglect or in cases where mandatory reporting is required by civil law” (*2016 Book of Discipline*, ¶341.5)

- e) The Virginia Code, the United Methodist Church and the Conference require that clergy participate in certain trainings and follow certain laws and policies. This Policy does not supplant or replace the following trainings and policies for clergy:
1. “Understanding Clergy Sexual Ethics,” a required training for all first time clergy and lay supply pastors sponsored by the Lewis Center for Church Leadership (<https://www.lewisonlinelearning.org/CourseInfo/10003>).
  2. “Child Abuse and Neglect: Virginia Mandated Reporting / Mandated Reporters: Recognizing and Reporting Child Abuse and Neglect” a required training for all first time clergy and lay supply pastors sponsored by the Virginia Department of Social Services.
  3. “Virginia Conference UMC Sexual Ethics Policy For Clergy, Diaconal Ministers, and Certified Lay Professionals (updated 2009)” and “Clergy and the Reporting of Suspected Abuse or Neglect (revised June 2009)”. These policies developed by the Conference define the theological context, standards of conduct, call to report misconduct, and commitment to action when it pertains to sexual abuse, harassment, and misconduct
    - a. <https://doc.vaumc.org/MinServices/VAConferencePolicies.pdf>

## **B. Hiring, Selecting, and Screening Adults to Provide Education and Care for Vulnerable Populations.**

### **1. Definitions**

- a) Staff: A person hired or approved by the Conference Entity for a paid position, including full-time, part-time, permanent or temporary and regardless of whether such position directly or routinely involves the care of children, youth, or vulnerable adults.
- b) Volunteer: Individuals approved by the Conference Entity to provide education and care for children, youth, and/or vulnerable adults on an unpaid basis.
1. Volunteers include:
    - i. Camp volunteer staff, both day and overnight;
    - ii. Leaders, assistant leaders, and other volunteers for events and activities under the direct supervision of the Conference Entity;
    - iii. Child care assistants; and
    - iv. Other individuals not expressly excluded from coverage of this Policy who participate in activities involving children, youth, and/or vulnerable adults.
    - v. Youth Volunteers: Volunteers under the age of 18. Youth Volunteers must work with and under the supervision of an adult volunteer, with an additional adult present according to the supervision requirements established in this Policy. Youth employees and youth volunteers must have signed parental permission before they can be authorized to serve.
  2. Members of conference boards, agencies, and/or commissions that include youth and/or vulnerable adults must have completed annual Safer Sanctuaries training.

3. Volunteer Agreement: Before beginning service, each volunteer will sign a statement that they have read, understand, and agree to abide by the Policy and other requirements of the Virginia Conference. Sample volunteer agreement attached at [Appendix II](#).
- c) Speakers, Short-Term Presenters, Facilitators, or Performers: Individuals participating as speakers, short-term presenters, facilitators, or performers in the ministry to children, youth, and/or vulnerable adults are not classified as staff or volunteers and are not required to as be screened in accordance with the procedures set forth in this Policy. However, these individuals will not be left alone with any child, youth, and/or vulnerable adults participating in a Conference-sponsored activity.

## **2. Background Check Requirement for all Staff and Volunteers**

- a) Crimes Against Children or Vulnerable People. Individuals with certain pending charges of, who have been convicted of, or have pled guilty to a charge of sexual misconduct, child abuse, molestation, neglect, or other violent misconduct, including but not limited to those offenses set forth as barrier offenses in Virginia Code § 19.2-392.02, are prohibited by law from working with children, youth, and vulnerable adults in certain state regulated and licensed programs. The Conference adheres to these same requirements for employing or using staff and volunteers in any capacity that involves direct contact with or supervision of children, youth or vulnerable adults.
- b) Background Check Required Prior to Service. Accordingly, the Conference requires every staff member and volunteer to undergo a background check that complies with Virginia Code §§22.1-289.034-.041; <https://law.lis.virginia.gov/vacodefull/title22.1/chapter14.1/article5/>). No staff member or volunteer will be allowed to serve vulnerable populations until the individual's background check is completed and demonstrates that the individual has not been convicted of any barrier crime as defined in Virginia Code § 19.2-392.02 and is not the subject of a founded complaint of child abuse or neglect.
- c) Exceptions:
  1. Convictions for offenses unrelated to abuse or neglect would not disqualify an applicant for employment or service.
  2. An applicant who has one misdemeanor conviction specified in the law may serve or be hired if the criminal offense did NOT involve abuse or neglect AND five years have lapsed since the conviction occurred.
- d) Background Check to Remain on File. The appropriate Conference Entity will maintain the completed background check.
- e) Background Check Required Every Two Years. Any current staff member or volunteer who has completed a background check within the 2 years prior to the Conference-sponsored event or will not be required to undergo an additional check. Returning seasonal volunteers will have a records check repeated every 2 years.
- f) Conference Entity to Pay Cost of Background Check. Procedures for payment for the background check required by this section will be established by each Conference Entity. The Conference will recommend an approved organization to conduct background checks through the national criminal history background check system.

- g) Training: Each Conference Entity shall ensure that its staff and volunteers participate in annual training and orientation. No individual shall be permitted to serve vulnerable populations until they have completed the required training. Training for staff and volunteers for any conference-sponsored event or program will include a session on this Policy.
- h) Approved Adult Leaders. For purposes of this Policy, Staff and Volunteers who completed a background check compliant with these requirements and who complete the necessary training shall be referenced in this Policy as “Approved Adult Leaders”.

### **C. Requirements for Staffing Conference-Sponsored Events**

Adequate supervision of children, youth, and vulnerable adults will be provided by Approved Adult Leaders under the supervision of the coordinating Conference Entity during a conference-sponsored event or activity.

#### **1. Two Adult Rule**

- a) Conference Entities shall assign at least two Approved Adult Leaders for all activities that are likely to include children, youth and/or vulnerable adults.
  - 1. At least two of the adults shall be unrelated by birth or marriage and must be at least 5 years older than the children and youth they supervise.
  - 2. If the group is divided such that the subgroups are not within view of one another, each subgroup must have two adults present.
  - 3. When the “Two Adult Rule” is not feasible, an approved adult leader will be required to conduct unannounced and randomly timed spot checks.
  - 4. Regardless of their gifts and maturity, persons 17 and under are legally youth and not adults. Accordingly, a youth volunteer may not be used to fulfill the “Two Adult Rule.”
- b) Certain activities and events may require the assignment of more than two Approved Adult Leaders. The Adult Leader shall use their discretion when determining whether more than two Approved Adult Leaders should be assigned. In determining the appropriate number of Approved Adult Leaders to assign, the Adult Leader may use the ratios in the *Safer Sanctuaries* resource as more fully described below.
  - 1. Children/Youth to Approved Adult Leader Ratios: *Safer Sanctuaries* suggests the following Child/Youth to Approved Adult Leader ratio for conference sponsored events.
    - i. 0-12 months: 2 Approved Adult Leaders, 8 children max (1:4)
    - ii. 1-3 years: 2 Approved Adult Leaders, 12 children max (1:6)
    - iii. 3-5 years: 2 Approved Adult Leaders, 20 children max (1:10)
    - iv. School-Age: 2 Approved Adult Leaders, 24 children max (1:12)
- c) The specific needs of individual children and youth may require an increase in Approved Adult Leaders per children
  - 1. Vulnerable Adult to Approved Adult Leader Ratios: The following ratios should be considered as a guide for participants with physical and intellectual disabilities:

- i. Participants needing constant and individual assistance or supervision: 1 Approved Adult Leader to 1 vulnerable adult.
  - ii. Needing close, but not constant, assistance or supervision: 1 Approved Adult Leader to 2 vulnerable adults
  - iii. Needing occasional assistance: 1 Approved Adult Leader to 4 vulnerable adults.
  - iv. Needing minimal assistance: 1 Approved Adult Leader to 5 vulnerable adults.
- d) The specific needs of individual vulnerable adults may require a change to these guidelines.
- e) Conference Entities shall strive to comply with this ratio whenever possible, but in any event shall, at a minimum, comply with the “Two Adult Rule” as described above.
- f) To the extent reasonably possible, adult leadership should be gender balanced in approximately the same proportion as the participant group.

## **2. Exceptions or Special Situations Requiring Departure from Recommended Ratios or from the Two Adult Rule**

- a) One-on-One Mentoring or Consultation: Any one-on-one mentoring or consultation between an adult leader and a child/youth/vulnerable adult is to be conducted in an area that is in plain view of others such as a common area of a church, a restaurant or coffee shop, or the lobby or open area of a public library. Any Approved Adult Leader conducting one-on-one conversations shall notify another Approved Adult Leader of the location and time of the conversation.
- b) Residential/Overnight Events: Any overnight event is classified as residential. In residential settings, overnight supervision must always be by Approved Adult Leaders of the same gender as the participants. Approved Adult Leaders shall not share the same bed with a child or youth under any circumstances. Child, Youth, and Vulnerable Adult to Approved Adult Leader ratios should be followed.
- c) Attendance at Events Not Designed for Children, Youth, or Vulnerable Adults: Conference Entities will not provide Approved Adult Leaders to provide education and/or care to children, youth and vulnerable adults at all events. Accordingly, it will be the responsibility of the parent/legal guardian of the child, youth or vulnerable adult to provide care and supervision. Conference Entities cannot be expected to have screened leaders/volunteers or be required to assume responsibility for such attendees. Boards and agencies should still make every effort to extend hospitality to such participants
  - 1. Such event may be, but not limited to:
    - i. publicized as an adults-only event at which childcare will not be provided
    - ii. youth under 18 years of age attend an event not specifically designed for youth
    - iii. children unexpectedly accompany an adult attending an event not designed for children
    - iv. vulnerable adults attend an event without the knowledge of the organizers, the board, agency, and/or commission sponsoring the event

### **3. Transportation to Off-Site Activities:**

- a) When transporting a child/youth/vulnerable adult to off-site activities, each vehicle transporting a child/youth/vulnerable adult must contain at least two [adults or Approved Adult Leaders]. This requirement shall not apply if all of the children/youth/vulnerable adults in the vehicle are related by blood, adoption, or marriage to the Driver or other adult in the vehicle.
- b) Driver Qualifications
  - 1. Must have undergone a background check including a motor vehicle record check that shows no violations, accidents, or other infractions in the past two years.
  - 2. Be at least 21 years of age.
  - 3. Must refrain from cell phone use while driving.
  - 4. At no time shall the Driver or other adult occupant in the vehicle consume alcohol or use illegal drugs or other substances that may impair Driver's ability to safely operate the vehicle while traveling to, from, or during a conference sponsored event (unless medication is medically necessary for the health and safety of the driver and/or passenger).
- c) Vehicle and Equipment Requirements
  - 1. Each vehicle must have at least as many operable seatbelts as passengers in the vehicle, and every passenger must be restrained by a seatbelt when the vehicle is in motion.
  - 2. Drivers and passengers must also follow airbag age/weight regulations per specific vehicle guidelines.
  - 3. A child safety seat meeting federal standards is required for children under 8 years of age (<https://www.vdh.virginia.gov/child-passenger-safety/>).
- d) In extenuating circumstance, a parent or legal guardian may consent to a deviation from the requirement that two adults be present in the vehicle. The consent must be in writing, signed and dated by the parent/legal guardian, and be submitted to the [Conference Entity Leader] in person, by mail, via text or attached to an electronic mail. If only verbal consent is obtained, the [adult or Approved Adult Leader or Driver] must notify the [Conference Entity Leader] in person, by phone call or by text. The [Conference Entity Leader] shall document the departure from the Policy in a signed, dated writing. The documentation referenced in this subsection shall be retained in the Conference Entity's files for at least two years.

### **4. Digital Spaces**

- a) With increased use of technology in ministry, Conference Entities shall implement Safer Sanctuary practices in digital spaces. "Digital Spaces" include but are not limited to any online space of communication and/or gathering in which interactions through video, picture, text, or voice are used. These spaces include but are not limited to social media, email, text, and online meetings or training.



1. Permission from a parent or caregiver is required before Approved Adult Leaders engage in digital communication with a child, youth, and/or vulnerable adult.
  2. Approved Adult Leaders will conduct digital communication with children, youth, and/or vulnerable adults in a professional manner, and will save all such communications.
  3. Approved Adult Leaders will not post or share photos or videos of children, youth, and/or vulnerable adults online without written permission from a parent or caregiver, and such photos will not share information about the location, date, or time of a gathering until after the event is past.
- b) Conference Entities that gather online will follow the same practices for in person gatherings (Two Adult Rule) when applicable.
1. If two Approved Adult Leaders are unable to be present, Conference Entities will record the gathering and retain the recording.
  2. Approved Adult Leaders should ensure Approved Adult Leaders are virtually present in any “breakout” rooms.
  3. Conference Entities will save and retain the chat.
  4. The Approved Adult Leaders shall enable the “waiting room” to ensure that the second Approved Adult Leader is present before children, youth, and/or vulnerable adults are admitted to the gathering space.

### **5. Release at End of Event**

- a) Conference Entities shall ensure written or electronic procedures that will document the time and identity of the individual to whom a child, youth, or vulnerable adult is released.
- b) Conference Entities shall release a child, youth or vulnerable adult to a parent, legal guardian, or adult authorized, in writing, by the parent or guardian to accept the care and custody of the child, youth, or vulnerable adult from the Conference Entity.
- c) Conference Entities will provide supervision in compliance with this Policy following a Conference-sponsored event or activity until all children, youth, and/or vulnerable adults are released.
- d) Local churches that bring children, youth, and/or vulnerable adults to a Conference-sponsored event or ministry shall assume primary responsibility for supervision and release at the end of the event. The Conference Entity shall inform the adult representative of the local church of this requirement.

### **6. Responding to a medical or other emergency:**

- a. Medical Release Form: Parents or legal guardians shall complete a medical release information form prior to the child, youth or vulnerable adult participating in the Conference-sponsored event or ministry. Each Conference Entity will also review the need for use of a similar form for staff and volunteers.
- b. Contact Parents and/or Necessary Officials: the Conference Entity shall, at its discretion, contact appropriate authorities, including local law enforcement and fire or emergency rescue personnel as necessary to protect the safety and well-being of all those participating in Conference-sponsored activities.
- c. Emergency Situations: Compliance with this policy is excused if compliance would prevent or delay a prompt and reasonable response to a medical or other emergency and/or compliance would hinder or delay medical treatment or result in harm or risk of harm to any person. Compliance is also excused if it is either impossible or, based upon the reasonable judgment of the Approved Adult Leader, creates a risk of harm.

#### **D. Inadvertent Failures to Follow Policy**

The Conference recognizes that in our active ministries to children/youth/vulnerable adults, occasionally, a staff member or volunteer will find it necessary to care for an individual without the assistance of another volunteer or staff member. During training, the Board, agency, and/or commission will emphasize that those ministering to children/youth/vulnerable adults should endeavor to minimize such instances. Failure to follow this Policy on a routine, unnecessary or unjustified basis will result in a review with the appropriate supervisor who will determine necessary follow-up.

#### **E. Policy Review**

This Policy shall be reviewed and approved every five (5) years by the Virginia Conference Common Table for Church Vitality.



## APPENDIX I

### Selected Definitions and Laws in the Virginia Code Applicable to Abuse

**1. Child Abuse.** An act committed by a parent, caregiver, or person in a position of trust (even though he/she may not care for the child on a daily basis) which is not accidental and which harms or threatens to harm a child's physical or mental health or welfare.<sup>1</sup>

- a) Causes or threatens to cause non-accidental physical or mental injury;
- b) Has the child present during the manufacture or attempted manufacture of a controlled substance or during the sale of such substance where such activity would constitute a felony violation;
- c) Neglects or refuses to provide adequate food, clothing, shelter, emotional nurturing, or health care;
- d) Abandons the child;
- e) Neglects or refuses to provide adequate supervision in relation to the child's age and level of development;
- f) Knowingly leaves a child alone in the same dwelling with a person, not related by blood or marriage, who has been convicted of an offense against a minor for which registration is required as a violent sexual offender; or
- g) Commits or allows to be committed any illegal sexual act upon a child, including incest, rape, indecent exposure, prostitution, or allows a child to be used in any sexually explicit visual material.
- h) An abused or neglected child is also a child who has been identified as a victim of sex trafficking.
- i) An act of child abuse may be committed by any person responsible for the care of another individual who is less than eighteen years of age. It does not matter whether the person caring for the child under the age of 18 is compensated or a volunteer

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<sup>1</sup> "A Guide for Mandated Reporters in Recognizing and Reporting Child Abuse and Neglect," Child Protective Services, Department of Social Services, Commonwealth of Virginia, July 2019, p. 3, [https://www.dss.virginia.gov/files/division/dfs/cps/intro\\_page/publications/mandated\\_reporting/032-02-0280-03-eng-07-19.pdf](https://www.dss.virginia.gov/files/division/dfs/cps/intro_page/publications/mandated_reporting/032-02-0280-03-eng-07-19.pdf).

worker. It does not matter whether the person routinely is entrusted with the care of children or whether such individual only occasionally comes in contact with children. It does not matter whether the person was entrusted with the care of a child for an hour or only a moment. It only matters that a child was abused or neglected by the person who, on the occasion in question, was responsible for the child's care.

## 2. Types of Child Abuse

- a) **Physical Abuse:** Physical abuse occurs when a caretaker creates or inflicts, threatens to create or inflict, or allows to be created or inflicted upon a child a physical injury by other than accidental means or creates a substantial risk of death, disfigurement, or impairment of bodily functions, including a child who is with his parent or other person responsible for his care either (i) during the manufacture or attempted manufacture of a Schedule I or II controlled substance or (ii) during the unlawful sale of such substance by that child's parents or other person responsible for his care, where such manufacture, or attempted manufacture or unlawful sale would constitute a felony violation of § 18.2-248 of the Code of Virginia. *See* 22 VAC 40-705-30(A). Examples: asphyxiation, bone fracture, brain damage, skull fracture, subdural hematoma, burns, scalding, cuts, bruises, welts, abrasions, internal injuries, poisoning, sprains, dislocations, gunshot, stabbing wounds, gunshot wounds, Munchausen syndrome by proxy, bizarre discipline, abusive head trauma and battered child syndrome, exposure to sale of manufacture of certain controlled substances, other physical abuse. *See* Child and Family Services Manual, Ch. C, Child Protective Services, Sec. 2.3, Virginia Department of Social Services, August 2022, <https://www.dss.virginia.gov/family/cps/manuals.cgi>.
- b) **Physical Neglect:** Physical neglect occurs when there is the failure to provide food, clothing, shelter, necessary medical treatment or supervision for a child to the extent that the child's health or safety is endangered. This also includes abandonment and situations where the parent or caretaker's own incapacitating behavior or absence prevents or severely limits the performing of child caring tasks pursuant to § 63.2 –100 of the Code of Virginia. This also includes a child under the age of 18 years whose parent or other person responsible for his care knowingly leaves the child alone in the same dwelling as a person, not related by blood or marriage, who has been convicted of an offense against a minor for which registration is required as a violent sexual offender pursuant to § 9.1-902. *See* 22 VAC 40-705-30 B. Physical neglect may include multiple occurrences or a one-time critical or severe event that results in a threat to health or safety. *See* 22 VAC 40-705-30 B1. Types of neglect include abandonment, inadequate supervision, inadequate clothing, inadequate shelter, inadequate personal hygiene, inadequate food, and malnutrition, knowingly leaving a child with a person required to register as violent sex offender, failure to thrive, labor trafficking, other physical neglect. *See* Child and Family Services Manual, Ch. C, Sec. 2.4, <https://www.dss.virginia.gov/family/cps/manuals.cgi>.
- c) **Medical Neglect:** Physical neglect may include medical neglect.
  1. Medical neglect occurs when there is the failure by the caretaker to obtain and or follow through with a complete regimen of medical, mental or dental care for a condition that if untreated could result in illness or developmental delays. However, a

decision by parents or other persons legally responsible for the child to refuse a particular medical treatment for a child with a life-threatening condition shall not be deemed a refusal to provide necessary care if

- i. such decision is made jointly by the parents or other person legally responsible for the child and the child;
- ii. the child has reached 14 years of age and is sufficiently mature to have an informed opinion on the subject of his medical treatment;
- iii. the parents or other person legally responsible for the child and the child have considered alternative treatment options; and
- iv. the parents or other person legally responsible for the child and the child believe in good faith that such decision is in the child's best interest.

2. Medical neglect also includes withholding of medically indicated treatment.

*See* 22 VAC 40-705-30 B3

d) Mental Abuse/Neglect: Mental abuse or neglect occurs when a caretaker creates or inflicts, threatens to create or inflict, or allows to be created or inflicted upon a child a mental injury by other than accidental means or creates a substantial risk of impairment of mental functions.

1. Mental abuse or neglect includes acts of omission by the caretaker resulting in harm to a child's psychological or emotional health or development.
2. Documentation supporting a nexus between the actions or inactions of the caretaker and the mental dysfunction or threat of dysfunction demonstrated by the child is required in order to make a founded disposition.
3. Mental abuse or neglect may include failure to thrive.
  - i. Failure to thrive occurs as a syndrome of infancy and early childhood that is characterized by growth failure, signs of severe malnutrition, and variable degrees of developmental retardation.
  - ii. Failure to thrive can only be diagnosed by a physician and is caused by nonorganic factors.
4. This includes patterns of verbal assault, constant family conflict, or exposure to domestic violence. *See* 22 VAC 40-705-30 C.

e) Sexual Abuse: Sexual abuse occurs when the child's parent, caretaker, or intimate partner of such parent or caretaker commits or allows to be committed any act of sexual exploitation, including sex trafficking as defined in 22VAC40-705-10, or any sexual act upon a child in violation of the law. *See* 22 VAC 40-705-30 D. Examples of such abuse are sexual exploitation, sexual molestation, intercourse/sodomy, sex trafficking, and other sexual abuse. *See* Child and Family Services Manual, Ch. C, Sec. 2.7, <https://www.dss.virginia.gov/family/cps/manuals.cgi>.

### 3. Adult Abuse

- a) Title 63.2 of the *Code of Virginia* establishes a protective services program for persons who are 60 and over and “incapacitated persons ages 18 to 59.” Adults with disabilities covered under the *Code* are those “persons who are 18 years or older whose vulnerability is related to impaired physical and/or mental health and/or physical disability.” The statutory scheme for the program is at Virginia Code §§ 63.2-1600, et. seq.
- b) Abuse: The willful infliction of physical pain, injury, or mental anguish or unreasonable confinement of an adult as defined in § 63.2-1603 of the Code of Virginia. *See* 22 VAC 30-100-10. Abuse includes battery and other forms of physical violence including, but not limited to, hitting, kicking, burning, choking, scratching, rough handling, cutting, biting, etc. It includes sexual assault, inflicting pornography, voyeurism, exhibitionism, and other forms of forced sexual activity on an older adult or an incapacitate person. It includes any sexual activity with an adult who is unable to understand or give consent, the control of an adult through the use of threats and intimidation, and the abuse of a relationship of trust. *See* Annual Report – State Fiscal Year 2022, Adult Protective Services Division, Department for Aging and Rehabilitative Services, p. 11, [https://www.dars.virginia.gov/downloads/publications/SFY2022\\_AnnualReport\\_022323.pdf](https://www.dars.virginia.gov/downloads/publications/SFY2022_AnnualReport_022323.pdf).
- c) Neglect: An adult as defined in § 63.2-1603 of the Code of Virginia is living under such circumstances that he is not able to provide for himself or is not being provided such services as are necessary to maintain his physical and mental health and that the failure to receive such necessary services impairs or threatens to impair his well-being. However, no adult shall be considered neglected solely on the basis that such adult is receiving religious nonmedical treatment or religious nonmedical nursing care in lieu of medical care, provided that such treatment or care is performed in good faith and in accordance with the religious practices of the adult and there is written or oral expression of consent by that adult. Neglect includes the failure of a caregiver or another responsible person to provide for basic needs to maintain the adult’s physical and mental health and well-being, and it includes the adult’s neglect of self. Neglect includes:
  1. The lack of clothing considered necessary to protect an adult’s health;
  2. The lack of food necessary to prevent physical injury or to maintain life, including failure to receive appropriate food for adults with conditions requiring special diets;
  3. Shelter that is not structurally safe; has rodents or other infestations that may result in serious health problems; or does not have a safe and accessible water supply, safe heat source, or sewage disposal. Adequate shelter for an adult depends on the impairments of the adult; however, the adult must be protected from the elements that would seriously endanger his health (e.g., rain, cold, or heat) and could result in serious illness or debilitating conditions;

4. Inadequate supervision by a paid or unpaid caregiver who provides the supervision necessary to protect the safety and well-being of an adult in his care;
5. The failure of persons who are responsible for caregiving to seek needed medical care or to follow medically prescribed treatment for an adult, or the adult has failed to obtain such care for himself. The needed medical care is believed to be of such a nature as to result in physical or mental injury or illness if it is not provided;
6. Medical neglect includes the withholding of medication or aids needed by the adult including dentures, eye glasses, hearing aids, or walkers. It also includes the unauthorized administration of prescription drugs, over-medicating or under-medicating, and the administration of drugs for other than medical reasons, as determined by a licensed health care professional; or
7. Self-neglect by an adult who is not meeting his own basic needs due to mental or physical impairments. Basic needs refer to such things as food, clothing, shelter, health, or medical care.

*See 22 VAC 30-100-10.*

- d) Exploitation: The illegal, unauthorized, improper, or fraudulent use of an adult as defined in § 63.2-1603 of the Code of Virginia or the adult's funds, property, benefits, resources, or other assets for another's profit, benefit, or advantage, including a caregiver or person serving in a fiduciary capacity, or that deprives the adult of his rightful use of or access to such funds, property, benefits, resources, or other assets. "Adult exploitation" includes (i) an intentional breach of a fiduciary obligation to an adult to his detriment or an intentional failure to use the financial resources of an adult in a manner that results in neglect of such adult; (ii) the acquisition, possession, or control of an adult's financial resources or property through the use of undue influence, coercion, or duress; and (iii) forcing or coercing an adult to pay for goods or services or perform services against his will for another's profit, benefit, or advantage if the adult did not agree, or was tricked, misled, or defrauded into agreeing, to pay for such goods or services or perform such services. *See 22 VAC 30-100-10.*

More information on identifying and responding to abuse can be found in "A Guide for Mandated Reporters in Recognizing and Reporting Child Abuse and Neglect," [https://www.dss.virginia.gov/files/division/dfs/cps/intro\\_page/publications/mandated\\_reporting/032-02-0280-03-eng-07-19.pdf](https://www.dss.virginia.gov/files/division/dfs/cps/intro_page/publications/mandated_reporting/032-02-0280-03-eng-07-19.pdf).



## APPENDIX II

### Reporting Abuse/Neglect or Suspected Abuse or Neglect

Appendix II provides an explanation of procedures that the Conference expects will be followed when a staff member or volunteer observes or suspects inappropriate behavior or abuse and behavior giving rise to a suspicion of abuse or neglect.

1. Ministers, Pastors, Clergy, Religious Leaders are required by law to report suspected child abuse/neglect to Child Protective Services. *See* Virginia Code § 63.2-1509(A)(19). Other professionals, including teachers who hold certain licenses and certifications issued in Virginia are also mandated reporters.
2. United Methodist clergy and religious professionals in the Virginia Conference shall, upon becoming aware of suspected child abuse or neglect, make a report or ensure that a report of the abuse/neglect or suspected abuse/neglect is made to Child Protective Services.
3. Anyone who knows or reasonably suspects abuse/neglect of a child, youth, or vulnerable adult may, but are not required to, report such suspected abuse/neglect.
4. Reports of abuse or neglect may be made 24 hours a day, 7 days a week by calling

**Children/Youth 1-800-552-7096**

**Adults 1-888-832-3858**

5. Alternatively, reports may be made by calling the local Department of Social Services.
6. The following information is required when making a report:
  - a) Name and address of the child/youth/vulnerable adult;
  - b) Age of the child/youth/vulnerable adult;
  - c) Names and address of the parent or caregiver;
  - d) Name of the one who suspects the child/youth/vulnerable adult is being abused or neglected
  - e) Any other helpful information
7. Reports of abuse/neglect will be transferred to the appropriate local Child or Adult Protective Service (C/APS) unit and will be investigated.



8. Reports of child abuse are confidential. If the reporter gives his or her name, it will remain confidential unless otherwise ordered by a court.
9. The reporter may choose to remain anonymous.
10. A person making a report cannot be held liable for making the report, unless it is proven that the person acted in bad faith or with malicious intent.
11. [A Guide For Mandated Reporters In Recognizing And Reporting Child Abuse And Neglect](https://www.dss.virginia.gov/family/cps/mandated_reporters/cwse5691/story_content/external_files/Mandated%20Reporter%20Guide.pdf) provides information to assist mandated reporters in fulfilling their legal obligations. [https://www.dss.virginia.gov/family/cps/mandated\\_reporters/cwse5691/story\\_content/external\\_files/Mandated%20Reporter%20Guide.pdf](https://www.dss.virginia.gov/family/cps/mandated_reporters/cwse5691/story_content/external_files/Mandated%20Reporter%20Guide.pdf).

“Reasonable Suspicion”: In accordance with [Section 63.2-1509](#) of the *Code of Virginia*, all staff who “in their professional or official capacity, have reason to suspect that a child is an abused or neglected child, shall report the matter immediately to the local department of the county or city wherein the child resides or wherein the abuse or neglect is believed to have occurred.” Neither the law nor The United Methodist Church requires an individual to know, with certainty, or to confirm that an individual has been abused prior to notifying appropriate officials. Moreover, investigating whether an individual has or has not been abused and ultimately whether a report of suspected abuse is, in fact, based upon actual abuse is a matter to be resolved by local and state professionals.

Suspicion of Abuse: If the board, agency, or commission staff member or volunteer believes that the child/youth/vulnerable adult that is the subject of his or her suspicions is in danger, immediate steps must be taken to protect the health, welfare, and well-being of the individual.

Inappropriate Behavior: Certain behavior, while inappropriate, does not lead a reasonable person to suspect that a child has been or is currently being abused; therefore, does not require notification of local or state officials or church officials. Nevertheless, such behavior must be addressed in a timely manner in order to protect children/youth/vulnerable adults. Any inappropriate language or conduct between staff or volunteers and a child/youth/vulnerable adult should be discussed with the appropriate staff member or volunteer who is responsible for administration and/or coordination of the activity in which the individual is participating.

Inappropriate conduct includes, but is not limited to, any action that violates

- Virginia law;
- This or any other written policy of the oversight board, agency, or commission, or
- Any written policy of the General Conference of The United Methodist Church or the Virginia Conference of The United Methodist Church.

If either the observer or the individual to whom such behavior was reported, upon reflection, determines that the behavior is not only inappropriate, but also gives rise to a suspicion of child abuse, the procedures for reporting such behavior to church and state officials shall be followed. Any reported behavior that is of a very serious nature, although not giving rise to a suspicion of

child abuse, shall be brought to the attention of the Conference staff member or volunteer in charge of the event who shall participate in all meetings with the individual involved in the misconduct. When appropriate, prompt warnings shall be issued and remedial actions shall be taken.

Reporting Procedures: All allegations of improper conduct involving children, youth, and/or vulnerable adults will be taken seriously and dealt with in a timely manner, according to state law. All reporting of allegations of misconduct during a Conference event will be handled as confidentially as circumstances reasonably permit.

If an allegation of misconduct occurs, all necessary information will be gathered in an appropriate manner. It is important that event staff adhere to all the procedures listed below. However, circumstances and seriousness of the incident may impact the order in which the procedures are followed. If event staff or volunteers become aware of misconduct, they will

- Provide emergency medical care, if needed;
- Immediately notify the appropriate Conference staff member and/or the volunteer responsible for coordinating the activity in which the individual is participating;
- Immediately begin to document, in writing, the relevant facts and observations. If the volunteer in charge or Conference staff member are unavailable, the Director of Connectional Ministries or the Assistant to the Bishop should be contacted. All volunteers will be given the name of the staff member responsible for the activity in which they are involved.
- Mandatory reporters will report the incident as required by law.
- The Conference staff member shall contact the Director of Connectional Ministries immediately upon determining that a reportable incident has occurred or immediately following a report to state officials. Additional contacts will be made by the Director of Connectional Ministries as appropriate.
- If the incident or behavior to be reported involves either of the persons to whom the report would ordinarily be made in accordance with this section, the individual observing the suspicious behavior shall report the incident to the Director of Connectional Ministries or the Assistant to the Bishop.
- Alleged perpetrator(s) should be immediately removed from the event.
- Event staff or volunteers will ensure that appropriate care is given to others who may have knowledge of or be affected by the incident.
- Following notification of the appropriate persons, the Conference staff person or the designated authority shall notify the parents/guardians of the child/youth/vulnerable adult.

Other Required Procedures of Reporting: All conversations and actions shall be documented in writing. Staff and volunteers who become aware of any reported incident or behavior will preserve strict confidentiality, except

- Between the individual reporting the behavior and the individual to whom the behavior was reported,
- Appropriate supervisory authorities,
- The parents/guardians of the involved individual unless the parents or others in the home are suspected of abusing the individual, and
- State or local officials.

No outside media shall be contacted and no statements generated other than by the Director of Communications of the Virginia Conference. Every effort will be made to protect the identity of the child/youth/vulnerable adult and those accused of and those reporting the suspicious behavior or incident.

Confrontation of Accused: No one shall confront the accused with the allegations unless and until advised by state or local authorities and/or Conference officials. The accused shall be relieved temporarily of event duties pending completion of investigation by the Conference and/or state and local officials.

Care for the Victims: The board/agency/commission and Conference shall extend whatever care and resources are deemed necessary to comfort both the victims of the abuse and their families and the accused and his or her family.

Insurance Carrier: The allegations will be reported to the Conference insurance carrier following notification of the Conference officials.

Media Communications: The Bishop and/or his/her designee are the only persons authorized to make statements to representatives of the media. All requests for statements should be directed to the Director of Communications.



**APPENDIX III**

**Conference Volunteer Agreement**

**Volunteer Agreement and Release from Liability**

Volunteer Name: \_\_\_\_\_

In signing this form, I understand and agree to the following terms and conditions related to my volunteer service with the Virginia Conference of The United Methodist Church:

- I recognize that, as a volunteer, I represent the above organization to the public. I accept responsibility for this status and will conduct myself accordingly. I understand that in the course of my service, I may learn certain facts about volunteers, participants, and donors which are of a highly personal and confidential nature. Examples of such information are medical diagnoses and treatment, phone numbers and addresses, finances, personal relationships, etc. I understand that all such information, including the identity of the individual, must be treated with total confidentiality (including on social media postings) and must remain confidential even after my service ends. Please initial here: \_\_\_\_\_
- I agree to abide by the child/youth/vulnerable adult protection policies of the Virginia Conference of The United Methodist Church. I understand that the limits of confidentiality, however, include that I must immediately report to the appropriate leadership any knowledge or involvement in regard to child/youth/vulnerable adult abuse and the intentions to do harm to another person or to oneself. Please initial here: \_\_\_\_\_
- I am aware that as a volunteer, I expose myself to potential hazards which include but are not limited to: kitchen accidents, cuts, burns, back injury from lifting, car accidents, property damage or injury to others in car accidents, falls, etc. I am voluntarily participating in this service with the knowledge of the potential hazards involved and hereby agree to accept any and all risks of injury. Please initial here: \_\_\_\_\_
- I agree that my assignees, heirs, distributees, guardians, and other legal representatives will not make a claim against, or sue for injury or damage resulting from the negligence or other acts, howsoever caused, by any employee, agent, or volunteer contractor of the organization as a result of my participation as a volunteer. I hereby release the Virginia Conference UMC from all actions, claims, or demands that I, my assignees, heirs, guardians and legal representatives now have or may hereafter have for injury resulting from my participation as a volunteer. Please initial here: \_\_\_\_\_
- If my volunteer service includes driving an automobile, I acknowledge that I have both a valid driver's license and automobile liability insurance policy as required by state law. I

agree to maintain my license and insurance in good standing for my tenure as a volunteer for the organization. I am knowledgeable of and agree to abide by local and state traffic laws. I agree not to drive while under the influence of alcohol and/or other intoxicating substances. Please initial here: \_\_\_\_\_

- I agree to bring any problems or conflicts that are beyond the scope of my volunteer service or ability, to the immediate attention of the appropriate leadership. Please initial here: \_\_\_\_\_
- As a volunteer, I understand that my services can be discontinued at any time for any reason. Please initial here: \_\_\_\_\_

This understanding will remain in effect throughout my continuous service as a volunteer. Should I serve as a volunteer for more than one year, a new agreement will need to be completed.

Signature of Volunteer \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

Signature of Parent (if volunteer is under 18 years of age) \_\_\_\_\_



## APPENDIX IV

### **Guidelines on Local Church Adult Leaders with Children/Youth/Vulnerable Adults Attending Events Sponsored by Boards/Agencies/Commissions of The Virginia Conference of The United Methodist Church**

For those Conference/District sponsored events where groups of children, youth, and/or vulnerable adults arrive with their own adult leadership, the local church shall be responsible for selecting and screening those adults. The board, agencies, and commissions of the Virginia Conference of The United Methodist Church suggest the following guidelines to direct ALL participating local churches in Conference events:

Each participating group from each local church should ensure that:

- No adult leader has been convicted of any illegal conduct involving a minor. It is highly recommended that each church obtains a national criminal records check on all adult leaders.
- Each adult leader has been a member or active constituent of The United Methodist Church for at least six months prior to serving as a leader.
- Adults are a minimum of five years older than the youth they are leading.
- Under no circumstances should anyone under the age of 21 be allowed to drive children/youth/vulnerable adults. Transportation to and/or from a conference sponsored event, when the transportation is not part of the event itself, should fall under the local church's child and youth protection policy. Furthermore, churches should be aware of and abide by their own individual church insurance policies (for example, some policies require a minimum driving age of 25 and a maximum driving age of 70).
- When transporting participants to off-site activities, no automobile will contain only one adult (driver) and one child/youth/vulnerable adult. Automobiles will contain either one driver and two or more participants or two adults and any number of children (within the seat belt limitations of the vehicle, whereas seatbelts are ALWAYS required). In Virginia, use of child safety seats which meet federal standards is required for children under 8 years of age (<https://www.vdh.virginia.gov/child-passenger-safety/>).
- Drivers and passengers must also follow airbag age/weight regulations per specific vehicle guidelines. If there is an extenuating circumstance causing only one adult and one child/youth/vulnerable adult to travel together in an automobile, permission must be obtained by a parent or legal guardian of the child/youth/vulnerable adult. This permission should be written, submitted digitally by text or email, and signed by the parent/guardian.

If only verbal consent is obtainable, the volunteer must document. It is understood that the adult driving the child must have undergone a background check including a motor vehicle record check.

- A minimum of two screened and approved adults per group are present as leaders throughout any event. A minimum of TWO males and TWO females is required for groups of mixed gender wherever adults WILL be in the same sleeping quarters as participants for overnight events. A minimum of one male and one female adult is required for groups of mixed gender where adults will NOT be in the same sleeping quarters as participants.
  - *Safer Sanctuaries* suggests the following Child/Youth to Approved Adult Leader ratio for conference sponsored events:
    - 0-12 months: 2 Approved Adult Leaders, 8 children max (1:4)
    - 1-3 years: 2 Approved Adult Leaders, 12 children max (1:6)
    - 3-5 years: 2 Approved Adult Leaders, 20 children max (1:10)
    - School-Age: 2 Approved Adult Leaders, 24 children max (1:12)
- Any one-on-one mentoring or consultation between an adult leader and a child/youth/vulnerable adult is conducted in a room (with the door open or a door with a window) or area that is in plain view of others, and with the knowledge of another approved adult.
- Adult leaders receive annual training on the policies and procedures of their local church related to reducing the risk of abuse and the reporting of any such incident.
- All participants have completed a signed Medical Release form and Covenant of Conduct for the event. (Churches will be able to use their own forms for this purpose, but if the church does not have its own forms it will be required to have each participant complete and sign the [Medical Release](#) and [Covenant of Conduct](#) forms of the sponsoring Board, agency, and/or commission of the event of the Virginia Conference.)
- The parents and legal guardians of each participant have been informed of the scope and nature of the event or program and its related activities.

Digital Spaces: With increased use of technology in ministry, it is important to implement Safer Sanctuary practices in digital spaces. Below are recommended best practices for supervising ministry in digital spaces.

- In communication with children, youth, and/or vulnerable adults, volunteers and staff should
  - Conduct digital communication in a professional manner;
  - Save all digital communications with children, youth, and/or vulnerable adults;

- Obtain permission from a parent or caregiver to engage in digital communication with a child, youth, and/or vulnerable adult.
- With regard to social media use, volunteers and staff should
  - Limit who can see your profile and use a higher level of security features;
  - Use judgment in accepting requests from children, youth, and/or vulnerable adults
  - Remove and/or do not post inappropriate comments, photos, etc.;
  - Be cautious when posting information about a gathering (time, location, date, participants) that will include children, youth, and/or vulnerable adults.
- In sharing Photos/Videos, staff and volunteers should
  - Obtain permission from a parent or caregiver to capture and share photos and videos of children, youth, and/or vulnerable adults online;
  - Refrain from using names or tagging children, youth, and/or vulnerable adults in photos and videos;
  - Review photos and videos for any vulnerable or compromising situations before sharing them online.
- In online Gatherings, staff and volunteers should
  - Follow the same supervision practices for in person gatherings (e.g. 2 adult rule, appropriate ratios);
  - If 2 adults are unable to be present, record the gathering and retain the recording
  - Ensure that any “breakout” rooms have adult coverage;
  - Save and retain the chat transcript;
  - Enable a password and “waiting room” (Waiting room will ensure that the second adult is present before children, youth, and/or vulnerable adults are admitted to the gathering space).

**Questions about these guidelines should be directed to the Conference staff member working with the board, agency, and/or commission. Contact information for that individual:**

**Staff Member:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Phone:** 804-521-1100 ext. \_\_

**E-mail:** \_\_\_\_\_@vaumc.org





**APPENDIX V**

**SAMPLE Parental Consent and Liability Release Form**

PARTICIPANT'S NAME \_\_\_AGE\_\_\_

BIRTH DATE \_\_\_\_\_ GENDER \_\_\_\_\_ ADDRESS \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_ PHONE \_\_\_\_\_ SCHOOL \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_ GRADE \_\_\_\_\_ PARENT(S)/GUARDIAN NAME(S) \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_ WORK PHONE(S)/ CELL PHONE(S) \_\_\_\_\_ / \_\_\_\_\_

**TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN:**

The undersigned do(es) hereby give permission for our (my) child:

\_\_\_\_\_ (“Participant”), to attend and participate in **(Name of Local Church)** children or youth ministry activities, events, and retreats during the period of **(Dates and Time Period of Current Calendar Year of School Year)**

**LIABILITY RELEASE:** In consideration of **(Name of Local Church)** allowing the Participant to participate in children or youth ministry activities, we (I), the undersigned, do hereby release, forever discharge and agree to hold harmless **(Name of Local Church)**, its directors, employees, volunteers and agents (collectively herein the “Church”) from any and all liability, claims or demands for accidental personal injury, sickness or death, as well as property damage and expenses, of any nature whatsoever which may be incurred by the undersigned and the Participant while involved in the children/youth activities. We (I) the parent(s) or legal guardian(s) of this Participant hereby grant our (my) permission for the Participant to participate fully in youth ministry activities, including trips away from the church premises. Furthermore, we (I) [and on behalf of our (my) minor Participant(s)] hereby assume all risk of accidental personal injury, sickness, death, damage and expense as a result of participation in recreation and work activities involved therein. Further, authorization and permission is hereby given to said Church to furnish any necessary transportation (within the limitations of church insurance and the law), food and lodging for this Participant. The undersigned further hereby agree to hold harmless and indemnify said Church for any liability sustained by said Church as the result of the negligent, willful or intentional acts of said Participant, including expenses incurred attendant thereto.

**PHOTOGRAPH AND PUBLICITY RELEASE:** We (I) the parent(s) or legal guardian(s) of this Participant give the **(Name of Local Church)** permission to use their name, likeness, image, voice, and/or appearance as such may be embodied in any pictures, photos, video recordings,

audiotapes, digital images, and the like, taken or made on behalf of **(Name of Local Church)** activities. I agree that **(Name of Local Church)** has complete ownership of such pictures, etc., including the entire copyright, and may use them for any purpose consistent with **(Name of Local Church)** missions. These uses include, but are not limited to illustrations, bulletins, exhibitions, videos, reprints, reproductions, publications, advertisements, and any promotional or educational materials in any medium now known or later developed. I acknowledge that I will not receive any compensation or remuneration for the use of such pictures, etc., and hereby release **(Name of Local Church)** and its agents and assigns from any and all claims which arise out of or are in any way connected with such use. I have read and understood this consent and release. I give my consent to **(Name of Local Church)** to use the Participant's name and likeness to promote **(Name of Local Church)** programs and/or their activities.

**MEDICAL TREATMENT PERMISSION:** We (I) authorize an adult, in whose care the minor has been entrusted, to consent to any emergency x-ray examination, anesthetic, medical, surgical or dental diagnosis or treatment and hospital care, to be rendered to the minor under the general or special supervision and on the advice of any physician or dentist licensed under the provisions of the Medical Practice Act on the medical staff of a licensed hospital or emergency care facility. The undersigned shall be liable and agree(s) to pay all costs and expenses incurred in connection with such medical and dental services rendered to the aforementioned child or youth pursuant to this authorization.

**EARLY RETURN HOME POLICY:** Should it be necessary for our (my) child or youth to return home due to medical reasons, disciplinary action or otherwise, the undersigned shall assume all transportation costs and responsibility.

**TRANSPORTATION PERMISSION:** The undersigned does also hereby give permission for our (my) youth to ride in any vehicle driven by an approved ADULT leader while attending and participating in activities sponsored by **(Name of Local Church)**. My child/youth and I understand that SEAT BELTS SHALL BE WORN AT ALL TIMES during transportation.



## APPENDIX VI

### **SAMPLE Youth Covenant of Conduct**

During the meetings, events, and trips under the sponsorship and guidance of **Name of Local Church**, I recognize that I am a representative of the Christian Community and I am responsible for my actions. I understand that by signing this Covenant, I agree to abide by the following guidelines:

#### **I Shall:**

- ☺ Recognize that everyone in the group is a part of the body of Christ. I will embrace inclusiveness by making sure that everyone feels welcome and important.
- ☺ Respect the physical and emotional well-being of others by “doing unto them as I would have them do unto me.” (This includes refraining from harsh play or violence, refraining from harmful jokes, respecting the need for sleep, etc.)
- ☺ Respect the health of my own body by refraining from the use of tobacco, alcohol, marijuana, vapes, and illegal drugs. I understand that the use of these substances is absolutely prohibited.
- ☺ Respect the things I use and the property of places I visit. The areas used for all events, including transportation, shall be left clean.
- ☺ Participate fully in all scheduled group activities and abide by additional group guidelines made during a special event or trip.
- ☺ Act appropriately with members of the opposite gender. This means no couples alone at any time, and no public displays of affection.
- ☺ Follow all instructions given by group leaders and volunteers without protest. (This does not mean an instruction may not be politely and discretely questioned if it seems unreasonable).
- ☺ Stay within the group or assigned sub-group at all times. I will not wander off alone or leave the activity site unless granted permission by an adult, and I will report for all designated check-in times.
- ☺ Hold safety in the highest regard and refrain from compromising my own safety or another’s safety.

- ☺ Provide a trusting environment for my peers. When others share something about themselves in a group discussion, I will not repeat that information to other friends outside of the group.
- ☺ Take the initiative to inform my guests of their responsibility to follow these guidelines when they visit the group or participate in an event or trip.

**Guidelines for Consequences:**

Consequences will focus on restoring peace with reconciliation among the parties involved. The goal of resolving each problem will be growth and learning through repentance and forgiveness. Any problems encountered will be handled within the group and by the adult leaders to the extent that this is possible. However, should a situation persist or become uncontrollable, the parent/guardian will be contacted and informed of the problem. Should the situation be urgent, the parent/guardian will be contacted immediately and will be responsible for picking up the youth from an event or trip.

**Child/Youth and Parent/Guardian Signature:**

In signing this covenant, I vow that I have read and understand these guidelines. I recognize that a covenant is a binding promise, and my signature is testimony that I agree to adhere to the provisions of this covenant.

**Signature of Child/Youth** \_\_\_\_\_ **Date** \_\_\_\_\_

**Signature of Parent/Guardian** \_\_\_\_\_ **Date** \_\_\_\_\_