

CHILD PROTECTION POLICY

ST. THOMAS UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

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Our Mission:

Becoming a community of Christ Followers

Senior Pastor: Reverend David Forrest

Pastor Haymarket Campus: Reverend Edward H. Johnson, Jr.

Assistant Minister: Leslie Oakes

Child Protection Policy Task Force:

Representatives of Children's Ministries Staff

Education Committee

Board of Trustees

SPRC

Church Membership and Legal Counsel

St. Thomas United Methodist Church CHILD PROTECTION POLICY

1. Purpose

The goal of the St. Thomas United Methodist Church (STUMC) children and youth ministries is to provide, with God's help, a solid foundation of Biblical truth which will instill in our young people a respect and love for Christ and His Church. The purpose of this policy is to ensure that we accomplish this goal in such a way that, first, parents can be confident that STUMC's facilities and programs nurture the children in a caring and secure environment, second, the children can see God's loving guidance and care personified, and finally, that the adults working with youth are protected from any situation that might lead to false accusations of misconduct.

2. Biblical Foundation

St. Thomas UMC seeks to express God's love of children as taught by Jesus and provide for their personal wholeness, growth and protection. The Bible is foundational to the understanding upon which our policies, procedures, and ministries must stand.

Behold, children are a gift of the LORD... Psalm 127:3a

At that time, the disciples came to Jesus and asked, "Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?" He called a little child and had him stand among them. And He said: "I tell you the truth, unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. Therefore, whoever humbles himself like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. And whoever welcomes a little child like this in My name welcomes me. But if anyone causes one of these little ones who believe in Me to sin, it would be better for him to have a large millstone hung around his neck, and to be drowned in the depths of the sea"

Our response to this Biblical mandate is to ensure that we maintain a safe, secure and loving place where caregivers, teachers and leaders, in the solemn knowledge of their responsibility, minister appropriately to the needs of the children. We look to demonstrate Christ's love by surrounding the children and youth of our church with such security and care that they see the reflection of His arms around them. Our responsibility is to provide this environment so that our children may both grow and grow nearer to God.

3. Virginia's Child Abuse Laws

Under Virginia law, Section 63.2-100, an abused or neglected child is defined as any child less than 18 years of age: 1. Whose parents or other person responsible for his care creates or inflicts, threatens to create or inflict, or allows to be created or inflicted upon such child a physical or mental injury by other than accidental means, or creates a substantial risk of death, disfigurement, or impairment of bodily or mental functions. 2. Whose parents or other person responsible for his care neglects or refuses to provide care necessary for his health. However, no child who in good faith is under treatment solely by spiritual means through prayer in accordance with the tenets and practices of a recognized church or religious denomination shall for that reason alone be considered to be an abused or neglected child. 3. Whose parents or other person responsible for his care abandons such child. 4. Whose parents or other person responsible for his care commits or allows to be committed any act of sexual exploitation or any sexual act upon a child in violation of the law. 5. Who is without parental care or guardianship caused by the unreasonable absence or the mental or physical incapacity of the child's parent, guardian, legal custodian or other person standing in loco parentis; or 6. Whose parents or other person responsible for his care creates a substantial risk of physical or mental injury by knowingly leaving the child alone in the same dwelling, including an apartment as defined in § 55-79.2, with a person to whom the child is not related by blood or marriage and who the parent or other person responsible for his care knows has been convicted of an offense against a minor for which registration is required as a violent sexual offender pursuant to § 9.1-902.

Section 63.2-1509 in Virginia law states that the following persons 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 or to the Department's toll-free child abuse and neglect hotline: 1. Any person licensed to practice medicine or any of the healing arts; 2. Any hospital resident or intern, and any person employed in the nursing profession; 3. Any person employed as a social worker; 4. Any probation officer; 5. Any teacher or other person employed in a public or private school, kindergarten or nursery school; 6. Any person providing full-time or part-time child care for pay on a regularly planned basis; 7. Any mental health professional; 8. Any law-enforcement officer; 9. Any mediator eligible to receive court referrals pursuant to § 8.01-576.8; 10. Any professional staff person, not previously enumerated, employed by a private or state-operated hospital, institution or facility to which children have been committed or where children have been placed for care and treatment; 11. Any person associated with or employed by any private organization responsible for the care, custody or control of children; 12. Any person who is designated a court-appointed special advocate pursuant to Article 5 (§ 9.1-151 et seq.) of Chapter 1 of Title 9.1; 13. Any person, over the age of 18 years, who has received training approved by the Department of Social Services for the purposes of recognizing and reporting child abuse and neglect; and 14. Any person employed by a local department as defined in § 63.2-100 who determines eligibility for public assistance.

Any person who makes a report or provides records or information or who testifies in any judicial proceeding arising from such report, records, or information shall be immune from any civil or criminal liability or administrative penalty or sanction on account of such report, records, information, or testimony, unless such person acted in bad faith or with malicious purpose.

In Manassas, if you have a concern that a child is being abused or neglected, you may call the Department of Social Services at 703-361-8277 during office hours or the State Child Abuse / Neglect Hotline at 800-552-7096 to report your concerns 24 hours a day.

4. Definitions of Child Abuse

A. LEGAL DEFINITION:

Child abuse is defined as per the above legal definition contained in Section 3, Virginia's Child Abuse Laws.

B. TYPES OF ABUSE, AS SUMMARIZED BY THE VIRGINIA CONFERENCE OF THE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

Physical Abuse. Physical abuse occurs when an adult (or even a larger child) injures a child and it is not an accident. It can include:

- assault
- shaking or slapping
- burning or scalding
- kicking or choking

Mental or Emotional Abuse. Emotional abuse deeply affects a child's self-esteem by submitting him/her to verbal assault or emotional cruelty. It does not always involve injuries we can see. It can include:

- close confinement, such as being shut in a closet
- inadequate nurture or the withholding of affection
- excessive punishment or extreme discipline
- knowingly permitting such behavior as drug or alcohol abuse

Neglect. Neglect is not hearing or addressing (ignoring) a child's basic needs for health, welfare, or safety resulting in harm to the child. It can include any of the following acts of negligence or maltreatment:

- failure to provide adequate food, shelter, clothing
- abandonment
- refusal to seek treatment for illness
- inadequate supervision
- health hazards in the home, school or church
- ignoring a child's need for contact, affirmation, stimulation and nurture

Sexual Abuse: Sexual abuse involves an act of a sexual nature between a child or teenager and an adult or significantly older, more powerful person who initiates that contact for the purpose of his/her own sexual arousal and/or gratification. It can include any of the following exploitive behaviors:

- inappropriate verbal stimulation
- fondling, incest, rape, sodomy
- exposing a child to pornography or adult sexual activity

5. Responsibilities of St. Thomas UMC

A. St. Thomas

As a provider of childcare and Christian education, STUMC is responsible for the safety and well-being of the children in its care. We are responsible both to the parents of the children and to the legal authorities for ensuring that our facilities meet all standards of physical and emotional safety and due care.

As an employer of childcare workers and as a group of caring volunteers, we are also responsible for ensuring that our staff, paid workers, and volunteers are protected from being in a situation where they may be falsely accused of inappropriate behavior toward any child in our care.

As a body of followers of Jesus Christ, we are responsible for providing love, care, and support that reflects God's own, for providing Christian fellowship and education, and for providing loving outreach to all attendees—from the oldest to the youngest—of our worship services, activities and programs.

Within our Christian mission, our policies are designed to provide protection to both the children and the workers by ensuring that no worker is ever placed into a position where they are alone with the children and that no worker uses violent or inappropriate discipline methods. With appropriate assistance and witnesses in place, no opportunity should ever arise for any worker to commit any act of abuse against our children.

B. Staff

Our entire staff is required to know all responsibilities of STUMC toward its children and toward the workers. They shall be trained in our policies and procedures. Those members of staff and officers of the church constituting the local response team (see Section 7, Reporting Child Abuse, below) or directly supervising paid childcare workers shall attend church training in child protection; shall be cognizant of their responsibilities in the event of an allegation of child abuse; and shall be fully trained in the conduct of their related duties.

C. Paid workers in Children and Youth Ministry Areas

Our paid childcare and youth workers are responsible for knowing both church policy and Virginia law regarding child abuse and protection. They must pass background checks and interviews, attend child protection training, and be prepared to document any incidents which may indicate the presence of abuse. They shall be required to read, understand, acknowledge and sign this policy before beginning their duties at STUMC. They are responsible for implementing and abiding by our written policies on child protection and classroom discipline.

D. Volunteer Workers in Children and Youth Ministry Areas

Our volunteer workers in children and youth ministry areas are responsible for knowing these policies before being permitted to work with the children. They must pass background checks and attend child protection training. We acknowledge that our volunteers are not childcare professionals and are not trained to recognize signs of abuse; however, our volunteers are responsible for remaining aware that the potential for abuse exists and that they are part of our efforts at prevention. They are responsible for abiding by our written policies on child protection and classroom discipline. Our volunteers are asked to prayerfully consider their calling to and behavior in the children and youth ministry areas before participating in the work, so that no inappropriate behavior arises on their parts.

E. Community Groups using STUMC facilities

Leaders / Representatives of community groups desiring to use our facilities must read, acknowledge and sign our Child Protection Policy before being permitted to use facilities belonging to STUMC. While using STUMC facilities, community groups must abide by the policies set forth in this document. All such groups will receive a copy of this document and shall file their completed acknowledgement form with the Trustees of STUMC.

6. Ways We Protect Our Children

To create the safest possible environment for children at St. Thomas, we will continue to follow all physical safety policies and will use several protection measures, as follows.

A. SIX MONTH RULE

St. Thomas UMC requires that any volunteer church workers in children or youth programs be members of the church for at least six months or be actively involved in the church for six months before beginning responsibilities. We make every effort to place new workers with longtime, experienced leadership volunteers. Paid workers, while not required to be members of STUMC, will always be supervised by senior staff members or experienced volunteer leaders.

B. WORKER SCREENING

Paid Staff. Before beginning employment, paid childcare and youth workers will be asked to sign a Form A containing a statement that they have never been convicted of an offense involving child abuse, neglect, moral turpitude, or any other offense defined in Virginia Code Section 63.2-1719, and that they have not been the subject of a founded complaint of child abuse or neglect. Anyone refusing to sign Form A will not be permitted to work with children or youth. In addition, applicants for paid staff positions will undergo a criminal record check, and will not be hired if they have been convicted of an offense involving child abuse, neglect, moral turpitude, or any other offense defined in Virginia Code Section 63.2-1719, or if they have been the subject of a founded complaint of child abuse or neglect.

Volunteers. In order to ensure that we have the right people working in any area of the life of the church, all volunteers are asked to prayerfully consider their calling toward a given ministry before committing to such service. Before accepting their service, the church staff and church members also pray that they are the right people to do the work. In this way, we are assured that most of the volunteers working in children and youth programs feel the Lord calls them to such a ministry and are prepared for and suited to the work.

Notwithstanding, all volunteer workers in programs that involve children and youth shall read, sign Form A and comply with the Child Protection Policy as set forth by St. Thomas United Methodist Church. Individuals who will be working with the children and youth on a volunteer basis shall sign a Form A containing a statement that they have never been convicted of an offense involving child abuse, neglect, moral turpitude, or any other offense defined in Virginia Code Section 63.2-1719, and that they have not been the subject of a founded complain to child abuse or neglect. If an individual proposed for a position working with children or youth is a known sexual or violent offender, the matter shall be brought to the pastor and the individual will not be assigned to work with children.

C. CHILD PROTECTION TRAINING

Before beginning their paid or volunteer service, workers with children and youth will be required to read the church's Child Protection Policy and sign Form A indicating that they have read and understand the policy and agree to abide by it. Persons will not be permitted to serve until the policy has been read and the form signed. Periodically (no less than once per year and preferably more frequently), training sessions related to the Child Protection Policy will be offered. All paid childcare and youth workers, church staff members and individuals (whether paid or volunteer) directly supervising paid childcare workers will be required to attend at least one training session per year, preferably before beginning their duties. Volunteer workers in children and youth programs, SPRC, Weekday Children's Board and members of the Board of Trustees will also be required to attend.

D. ALLERGIES

St. Thomas United Methodist Church recognizes the serious health risks peanuts and other food allergens pose to those affected by them. Through proper hand washing, education, communication and attention to labeled ingredients, we strive to minimize the risk of exposure to food allergens by those participating in church sponsored programs and activities. However, St. Thomas United Methodist Church makes no claim to being a peanut or other food allergy free facility.

E. ADULT SUPERVISION POLICIES

Two Adult Rule. Ideally, workers in our children and youth programs shall not be alone with children at any time, for the protection of both the children and the workers. Workers must be at least five years older than the oldest participant in the program. This will be accomplished by implementing the following rules:

- Teachers and leaders will be assigned in teams of two or more per classroom and for all church activities involving children and youth. (This is required for all church sponsored and community groups of children or youth who use our church facility.)
- Volunteers in children and youth programs must be at least 5 years older than the oldest participant in the program or activity and Nursery volunteers must be 16 years of age or older.

- In the event that husband and wife serve in leadership together, a third, non-family member will be present.

In the event that it is not possible to have at least two adult workers in the room, there will be security personnel roving the halls closely monitoring any classroom where only one adult is present. The same will apply to youth programs. If there are groups meeting in separate physical locations and it is not possible to have at least two adults with each group, there will be an adult roving back and forth between groups to monitor.

All programs falling under the Sunbeam Children’s center, including, but not limited to the All Day Care, Preschool and Parent’s Morning Out programs, will abide by Virginia licensing regulations in respect to the child to adult ratios.

Supervision of Mixed Gender Groups. When a group includes both boys and girls and if the group 1.) stays overnight at the church, or 2.) leaves the church premises, both male and female leaders must be present.

Field Trip Policy. All field trips under the auspices of St. Thomas UMC are guided by the provisions of this Child Protection Policy. All field trips will be supervised by at least the minimum number of two adults in the vehicle as required by our policies. In addition, a signed parental consent form with authorization for emergency medical care is required for all such trips. All drivers of automobiles transporting children or youth shall be at least 25 years of age, covered by liability insurance and must sign a release allowing STUMC to run a DMV driving record check, and must sign Form A.

AWANA is a ministry of STUMC which includes children and adult leaders from the local church community. New leaders will be teamed with established leaders and evaluated over a six month trial period for acceptance as leaders.

Girl and Boy Scouting organizations meeting at STUMC will abide by their national organization policies, in addition to this policy.

Any new groups who wish to meet at STUMC will abide by these procedures unless they meet and coordinate with the Local Church Response team to evaluate and approve special considerations.

F. CLASSROOM DISCIPLINE POLICY

The philosophy underlying classroom discipline at St. Thomas UMC is that it is an opportunity to teach children the importance of self-respect and respect for others. Paul instructed that assemblies of Christ’s church ought to be orderly and edifying (I Corinthians 14:26-33). Therefore, in our church family, disruptive behavior will not be permitted in our classrooms, nor will any child be treated with disrespect or undue harshness when requiring correction. The following guidelines will govern the disciplining of children in our classrooms:

- If a child is misbehaving, the adult will tell the child (in age appropriate terms) specifically what is not acceptable and indicate the expected behavior. Example: “We do not throw the blocks, we use the blocks for building.” (Identification.)
- If identifying the misbehavior does not work, the child will be guided to another activity. (Redirection.)

- If, after redirection, inappropriate behavior continues, the child will be placed at a table to work alone so that he/she is not affecting the other students. (Separation.)
- If the disruptive behavior continues after these steps have been taken, the child may be taken to the Director of Children’s Ministries and left in their care. (Removal.) If this becomes necessary, the child’s parents will be informed and the situation discussed with them the same day.
- Off Campus Ministry involving children, youth including Small Groups, the leaders of these groups shall abide by this Child Protection Policy and shall sign applicable parts of Form A
- *At no time* will physical punishment, verbal abuse, ridicule or excessively harsh verbal reprimand be used with children under our care.

Although these guidelines are phrased as discipline for children, if adapted to the appropriate developmental level the measures may also be applied to disciplinary situations involving youth.

G. CONSEQUENCES FOR POLICY VIOLATIONS

If any action is observed, *not constituting abuse*, but in violation of this Child Protection Policy, the following consequences will result. (Examples of such actions: failing to abide by the two-adult rule, failing to collect permission slip before allowing a youth to participate in a field trip, teacher swatting toddler on the hand for misbehaving, adult loses temper at repeated challenge / disruption from teen and an observer feels that he /she crosses the line between correction and harsh reprimand.)

A volunteer acting in such a manner may be 1.) taken aside by the volunteer or staff member in leadership and reminded of the disciplinary and child protection policies, 2.) approached by the pastor and reminded of the disciplinary and child protection policies, and (if necessary) counseled on appropriate anger management, 3.) removed from his / her position with the children or youth ministries and barred from participating in such ministries until he / she attends a Child Protection training session, or 4.) permanently barred from contact with children or youth ministries. The choice of consequences will reflect the severity of the offense and whether such action is a repeated offense.

A paid employee observed in the same actions will be addressed by St. Thomas UMC Personnel Policy.

H. OPEN CLASSROOM POLICY

Classrooms or childcare rooms may be visited, at any time, without prior notice by church staff, parents, or other volunteer church workers. Staff, parents or volunteers visiting classrooms in which Sunday School, Bible study, or a rehearsal is in progress are only requested to avoid causing disruption to the students / participants. There are also glass windows in the doors to permit observation. The Director of Children’s Ministries will conduct random periodic observations and inspections of childcare rooms and classrooms.

7. STUMC Policy and Procedures on Reporting Child Abuse

There are two possible situations requiring immediate action on the part of STUMC, its members, staff, and volunteers. If there would be allegations of child abuse at STUMC, or if a child coming to STUMC exhibits signs of abuse occurring away from the STUMC setting, the procedures below shall be followed.

Due to the serious sensitive nature of such a crisis, and the potential harmful effects (both to the child and to the accused) of false accusations and unrestrained gossip, **the strictest confidentiality** will be observed throughout the reporting process.

In order to minimize confusion and talk, *anyone* associated with STUMC children or youth programs *who observes or has reason to suspect abuse* should report these observations *directly to the head of the relevant program* as follows:

TABLE I

Program involved	Who to report to
Nursery	Director of Children’s Ministries Assistant Director of Children’s Ministries
Sunbeam Children’s Center	Director of Sunbeam Children’s Center or Assistant Director of Sunbeam Children’s Center
All other children’s programs	Director of Children’s Ministries Assistant Director of Children’s Ministries
All Youth programs	Director of Youth Ministries

The head of the relevant program is then responsible for ensuring that the Senior Pastor is informed of the allegations and that the procedures laid out below are set in motion.

Note that

1. If the supervisor or head of program *is not available* or
2. If the supervisor or head of program *is the accused*

The observer is then responsible for directly contacting the Senior Pastor immediately. If the Senior Pastor is the accused, the Associate Pastor should be contacted instead.

Specific procedures for reporting suspected child abuse follow, *keeping in mind that confidentiality for both the victim and accused are to be strictly observed at all times:*

1. Treat any allegation of child abuse seriously; do not ignore the issue in the hope that it will go away. Any individual observing acts of abuse occurring *at STUMC* is required by law to report this. Any individual associated with STUMC’s child and youth programs is required by law to report suspected abuse if they observe in any child signs of abuse having occurred. Training sessions will include definitions of abusive acts and recognition of classic signs of abuse.
2. There will be a Local Church Response Team responsible for managing the STUMC response to the situation. This Team shall be comprised of the Senior Pastor, a representative of the each of the following, to be designated by the chairperson of the respective committees: Board of Trustees, Church Council & Staff Parish Relations. If one of the members of the Team is the accused, an alternate will be selected to replace the individual involved. Any allegations of child abuse must be reported immediately to the Local Church Response Team.
3. The pastor and program head shall pray for all persons affected by the allegation, and for an atmosphere of healing in the church.

4. The individual reporting the abuse shall document in writing by completing a confidential incident report form and the pastor / program head shall document all procedures observed in handling the allegation.
5. The appropriate individual (primarily the Senior Pastor) will perform necessary notification as follows:
 - Call the Alexandria District Superintendent immediately. In accordance with the Virginia Annual Conference Policy on misconduct, the District Superintendent will then contact the Conference Response Team who will send a representative to St. Thomas UMC as quickly as possible, preferably within 24 hours.
 - Notify the Virginia Department of Social Services (800) 552-7096 and/or the local police department of the allegation, as required by law.
 - Notify the parents of the alleged victim, and the parents of the alleged perpetrator, if a minor.
 - Notify the church's insurance company, particularly in the case of abuse allegedly occurring at STUMC.
 - Notify SPRC in cases of paid employees.
6. Individuals involved in reporting or the Local Church Response Team ***should not*** confront the accused with the allegation. However, if the accused has assigned duties within the life of the church, that person must be temporarily relieved of his / her duties until the investigation is concluded.
7. The pastor should extend whatever care and resources necessary, but *under no circumstances* should the pastor or any church leader or member investigate the allegation. In providing care to the alleged victim and the accused, and their families, the pastor or church leader should *under no circumstances* be drawn into a discussion of the truth or falsity of the allegation. Do not assign blame or take any steps that involved establishing or refuting the allegation.
8. It is appropriate to show care, comfort and reassurance for the alleged victim. This should be the pastoral objective from the moment the allegation is received.
9. Observe confidentiality for both the alleged victim and the accused.

8. Policy Review

The Child Protection Policy of St. Thomas United Methodist Church shall be reviewed annually by the STUMC Child Protection Task force (defined as a representative from each of the following groups: Board of Trustees, Church Council, Staff-Parish Relations, and Education) and their findings shall be reported to Church Council. If any additions or modifications to this policy are required, the Child Protection Task Force will draft any proposed amendments for adoption and vote on them. They will then submit them with their annual findings to the Trustees and Church Council. A verification follow-up report will be made each year at the Church Conference to ensure the integrity of the policy and procedures.

9. Policy Implementation

All programs of the church involving children or youth will implement these policies. This policy does not take the place of or invalidate existing policies concerning additional physical safety procedures (fire safety and evacuation policy, playground safety policy, minimum adult supervision-to-student ratios policy, nursery cleaning / sterilizing policy, etc.) used in our children and youth programs.

This policy is in effect immediately upon approval by the Church Council. All staff, paid childcare or youth program workers, and volunteers in the children or youth programs and all groups meeting in the church facilities will receive training, will be given a copy of this policy and required to sign the Policy Form A certifying that you have read and understood the policy and have received training.

Exceptions to this document at St. Thomas Haymarket Campus will be approved on a case by case basis by the St. Thomas Church Council.

Form A

Acknowledgement and Release Form (Child Protection Policy)

Initials		Stipulation
_____		I hereby certify that I have read and understand the Child Protection Policy set forth by St. Thomas United Methodist Church (STUMC) and agree to abide by the policy.
(Yes)		
_____	_____	I hereby certify that I have not been convicted of an offense involving child abuse or neglect, moral turpitude, or any other offense defined in Virginia Code Section 63.2-1719.
(Yes)	(N/A)	
_____	_____	I hereby certify that I have not been the subject of a founded complaint of child abuse or neglect. I give consent for STUMC to run a personal background check and/or criminal history report for the confirmation of this information.
(Yes)	(N/A)	
_____	_____	I also give consent for STUMC to run a personal DMV driving record check if I will be transporting minors in a vehicle.
(Yes)	(N/A)	

Printed Name: _____

Signature: _____ Date: _____

Area of Ministry: _____

↑ Children (Infant – 5th Grade)

↑ Youth (6th Grade – Age 18)