



SAFE SANCTUARIES POLICY REVIEW GUIDE

Each local church context is unique. As such, each church should gather a team to create, review, update, and enforce your Safe Sanctuaries policy that meets the needs of their individual context.

The conference recommends that this team include representatives of the following: age-level ministries, Staff/Pastor-Parish Relations Committee, Board of Trustees, and Finance Committee, as well as others whom they invite to participate in the team's work.

As your team meets to create a new policy or review your current policy and procedures, consider the following:

- Do individuals need to be active participants or must they be official members of the church in order to work or volunteer with children, youth or vulnerable adults?
- Given the activity level of your local ministry, how long does someone need to be involved before they should be put in a place of volunteer leadership?
 - Best practice recommends at least six months.
 - If you are in ministry with young adults or college-aged persons and want to encourage their leadership, it is recommended that the timeframe be at least three months.
- Should you consider a minimum age a person must reach before being considered a youth helper?
 - Consider developing a covenant of conduct and expectation to provide support and structure to youth helpers.
- Before you run any background checks, it is imperative that you agree upon the way you will respond to any convictions that are returned.
 - Who will run the background checks? (The conference partners with Trak-1 Technologies to conduct background checks. Sign up your church today at <https://trak-1.com/r/wnccumc>.)
 - Who will review the background checks?
 - Who will have access to the information gleaned from the check?
 - When a criminal conviction is reported, what will you do?
- Before you run any motor vehicle checks, you need to agree upon how to handle the information.
 - Who will review and receive the information?
 - What will disqualify an applicant from serving?
 - Where will the information be stored and who will have access?



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- Check with your church insurance company to ensure that you know the minimum and maximum ages of drivers insured to drive church vehicles, as well as any information you need to collect from drivers.
- What are your specific ministries with children, youth and vulnerable adults and what regulations or procedures need to be put in place to ensure leader and participant safety? For example:
 - Do you have a pick-up procedure for children's church?
 - What are the expectations for off-site or overnight events?
- What are the benefits or risks of your physical facilities? For example:
 - Do you have a playground? Is it enclosed or is it open to the public?
 - Do you have half-doors or windows to view into classrooms and offices?
 - Where are your entrances?
- What forms will be referenced in the policy and utilized in procedures? (e.g. liability release forms, medical forms, background check consent forms, volunteer applications, accident/injury reports, incident/suspected abuse reports, etc.)
 - Where can the fillable forms be accessed and how is that advertised?
 - How should reports be submitted? Who should review them?
 - Where will completed forms be stored and who will have access?
- Who should be the designated media contact, in the case that an incident attracts media attention?

Resources

Book resources:

- *Safe Sanctuaries: Reducing the Risk of Abuse in the Church for Children and Youth* by Joy Thornburg Melton
- *Safe Sanctuaries in a Virtual World* by Joy Thornburg Melton and Michelle L. Foster
- *Safe Sanctuaries: The Church Responds to Abuse, Neglect, and Exploitation of Older Adults* by Joy Thornburg Melton

Online resources:

- Western NC Conference website: <https://www.wnccumc.org/safesanctuaries>
- Discipleship Ministries: <https://www.umcdiscipleship.org/leadership-resources/safe-sanctuaries>
- Trak-1 Technologies: <https://trak-1.com/r/wnccumc/>

Human resources:

- Rev. Michelle Foster-Beckerleg, WNCC Safe Sanctuaries Consultant: mfoster@wnccumc.net
- Havaleh Havelka, WNCC Training and Resource Specialist: havelka@wnccumc.net