

Safe Sanctuaries Policy Revised 2024 & 2025)

The Session, in an effort to continue the goal of St. Andrews Presbyterian Church to foster a friendly, stimulating and thoughtful place for children to know God and experience the love of Jesus Christ by our example and God's blessing, adopts the Safe Sanctuaries Policy and pauses to reflect upon what Jesus was saying about how we are to treat one another, especially children.

"An argument arose among them as to which one of them was the greatest. But Jesus, aware of their inner thoughts, took a little child and put it by his side, and said to them, "Whoever welcomes this child in my name welcomes me, and whoever welcomes me welcomes the one who sent me; for the least among all of you is the greatest." - Luke 9:46-48

The goal of the Session and therefore the goal of St. Andrews Church in adopting this policy is to provide a safe environment for the children who visit St. Andrews and worship at St. Andrews while at the same time strive to encourage staff and volunteers to continue to work with our children.

The Session, in adopting this policy, recognizes that a child, despite the good intentions of the institution within which the child dwells and is learning, can and has been by history the victim of those who would violate the individual's person and thus violate our church family.

Guiding Principles of St. Andrews' Policy

To provide a safe environment for all children and youth attending St. Andrews Church, Sunday School, youth programs, attending other activities at the church and attending activities sponsored by the church but away from the church property.

To continue to place in service teachers and volunteers who are spiritually and emotionally mature and respect the child as an individual.

To create standards which will not impede the efforts of St. Andrews to provide Christian ministry, volunteerism and at the same time, maximize safety of our children and to uphold the current legal requirements.

Intent of the Policy

The goal of St. Andrews in formulating for our children a safe sanctuaries policy, is to do all we reasonably can do to protect any child or youth from being physically, mentally or sexually abused while participating in St. Andrews sponsored events. Abuse, harassment, bullying or any other intimidating behaviors are not acceptable for children of God whether the behaviors are perpetrated against children and youth within our congregation or otherwise participating within confines of our church or any activity of the church that takes place away from church.

Abuse can be defined as putting another in danger by action, word or omission. There are many different types of abuse such as neglect, physical abuse, verbal abuse, sexual abuse or emotional abuse. Examples of such behaviors might be non-accidental physical injury inflicted upon another; language that is degrading or threatening; inappropriate or unwelcome sexual interactions; or conduct that causes harm to another's psychological or intellectual functioning. These types of

behaviors are not Christ-like, whether they occur in person or virtually (phone, social media, email or text messages for example).

A. In person practices

Activities with students should be held in spaces that are open to public viewing. At no point should a student be in any room or situation without the public or staff having the ability to supervise or observe the space. Restrooms are a consideration, but at no point should a student be in a locked restroom with no accessibility to the public. In addition, while situations may arise in which privacy may be needed for a staff member in active counseling situations the student and staff member should be in a room with a window that has an unobstructed view into the room.

B. Two Adult Rule

Any activity sponsored by St. Andrews church, whether it is a program, event, or a ministry involving children, shall require two unrelated adults to be present.

C. Social Media Policy

Social Media will be defined as any means of communication through digital or online means. All Social Media interactions should be open and accessible to the Student's Parents/Guardians. If a student 'friend requests' or 'follows' a volunteer or staff member, the parent/guardian should likewise be 'friend requested/followed' and made aware of the online interaction. The expectation of communication and behavior is to be appropriate and not of a nature that is inappropriate, disrespectful, harassing, bullying, manipulative, extortive, or in any way abusive. Additionally, no communication with a student should include any form of photo, picture, drawing, painting, or inappropriate form of content of violence, nudity, or sexual activity. All digital and social media messages, comments, or communication should be of a non-self-deleting nature. Messages/texts/posts to a minor should not be deleted. Messages that digitally self-destruct will not be tolerated or used as a means of communication.

D. FIRST AID, CPR, AND TRAINING

First-aid and CPR training will be made available by St. Andrews for all staff and volunteers who work with Children and Youth on a regular basis.

In addition, a basic procedure to provide training on safe ministry for all children and youth to include

1. Expectations for Volunteers, Staff and Leaders working with children and youth.
2. St. Andrews policies for providing safe sanctuaries for children and youth.
3. Appropriate steps to report an incident where a child has been abused and details of state laws regarding child abuse.

E. FIVE YEAR RULE

All paid staff of the church shall be a minimum of five years older than the children or youth they are supervising. This rule shall also apply to volunteers who assist in youth ministry or aid in youth activities except where the volunteer is assisting an adult who complies with this rule. This rule acknowledges that St. Andrews uses volunteers from its senior high students during Church school for the lower grades.

F. ADVANCE NOTICE TO PARENTS

During an event for ministry with children and youth, advance notice and full information regarding the events, shall be made available/given to the parent/guardians and students participants. All curriculum and materials for children and youth will be available for review, upon request.

G. PARENT AND FAMILY EDUCATION

St. Andrews shall provide on occasion an information session during which members of the congregation, families and children can be educated on the facts about child abuse and the components of the church's plan. Suggested speakers and activities could include law enforcement officers, members of the local Children and Youth Agency, medical personnel, attorneys, video vignettes, the church policy and a time for worship and prayer.

H. RESPONDING TO ALLEGATIONS OF ABUSE

All staff and volunteers shall be acquainted with the reporting requirements of PA State Law and shall be familiar with this policy.

The Designated Spokesperson is the Elder from Session, who is chair of the Administration and Personnel Committee. If an alternate spokesperson is needed, the Clerk of Session shall act as the designated spokesperson. All questions or contacts with respect to child abuse shall be directed to her or him.

The designated spokesperson should be prepared to state the church policy for prevention of child abuse, the concern of the church for the safety of the victim and all children, and the procedures the church has followed to reduce the risk of abuse to children.

The designated spokesperson shall, upon report or notification of abuse, contact the insurance company for the church, and the attorney and shall prepare a brief statement. The spokesperson and all staff will cooperate fully with any investigation by law enforcement authorities.

Notification to Parents. When an incident of child abuse from outside of the immediate family is suspected or reported, the designated spokesperson for St. Andrews shall with all due diligence notify the parents of the child.

Sympathetic Concern of the Victim. St. Andrews is committed to the faithful response to the victim which shall include taking any allegation very seriously and respecting the victim's privacy as well as providing sympathetic concern for the victim and his or her family.

Removal of the Accused from Position Without Hostility. Faithful response to the accused abuser shall include acknowledgement by the accused that the abusive behavior must stop, repent and turn in a new direction. The accused faithful response will include the removal from his or her position as a worker or volunteer with child and youth until the allegations are fully investigated and resolved. The session shall have the authority to provide for permanent removal upon a completion of the investigation of abuse.

Criminal History and Information Check. St. Andrews currently has in effect a requirement that all staff and all volunteers, who regularly supervise and/or are responsible for children or youth, submit forms for:

1. Pennsylvania Child Abuse History Clearance
2. Pennsylvania State Police Criminal Record Check
3. Federal Bureau of Investigation Criminal Background Check (volunteers may provide a signed affidavit if they have resided in PA for 10 years or more)
4. Complete the required Mandated Reporter training. Training websites are available through the office
5. If the individual will be driving students, have a minimum of 10 year Driver history check on file with the church and be over the age of 25.
6. Have all of the above updated every 60 months

I. HOW TO REPORT:

All staff and volunteers shall immediately make a report of any suspected abuse directly to the PA Department of Child Welfare.

A report must be submitted in one of the following two ways:

>Orally to the PA Department of Child Welfare Information Solution @ 1-800-932-0313 which must then be followed up within 48 hours with a written report

OR

>Submit a report online within 48 hours to www.compass.state.pa.us/cwis where St. Andrews Presbyterian Church is registered as an organization

After a report has been submitted, one must immediately report any suspected abuse to the designated spokesperson of St. Andrews Presbyterian Church.

*****IT IS NOT YOUR JOB TO DECIDE WHAT IS ABUSE, ONLY TO REPORT ANY SUSPECTED ABUSE.** Penalty for failure to report child abuse can range from a misdemeanor of second degree to a felony of the second degree.

J. CONGREGATION.

When reports are received from or regarding a child or youth member of the congregation where that report has not come to a member of the staff, this should be reported immediately to the attention of the Pastor and the Youth Director. At that time, the process outlined above will be followed. After the proper reporting procedures have been followed (if necessary), the Pastor will lead the investigation and organize a team unless he or she is compromised; then the Clerk of Session will lead the team. The Youth Director will be involved as appropriate. Notification to Clerk of Session and Chair of Christian Education or Administration and Personnel will be made as appropriate to the situation. Consultation

with (church) attorney may be sought as appropriate. Additional members of church leadership will be involved in the investigation and communication of the situation as needed or appropriate. An internal investigation will be conducted as quickly as possible. The team makes recommendations for resolution to the Session and keeps those involved informed as the investigation progresses. Information will be shared with congregation and externally (to the press for example) as appropriate. Names of anyone involved under the age of 18 will not be released by the church and held in the strictest confidence by those who are involved in the investigation. Point of contact for any external communication is the Pastor or Clerk of Session (whomever is leading the investigative team).

Any crisis management communication regarding the alleged situation (whether within or outside of the congregation) should be spearheaded by the Pastor, with the input from the Clerk of Session, the Youth Director and/or the Chair of the Administration and Personnel Committee as appropriate.

The Session shall acquaint the members of the congregation with the policy in summary form; and, provide copies to anyone upon request.

I Acknowledge the above policies and practices as St. Andrews Presbyterian Safeguards for students, families, individuals, and our community to best worship together. I agree to abide by this policy for the safety of the community and to better enable my ministries to enable growth in faith with one another.

Signed: _____

Print Name: _____

Date: ____ / ____ / ____