**Northside ChurchSafe Sanctuary Policy Overview**

Northside Church: A United Methodist Congregation (hereafter "Northside") believes that we are called by God to create a safe sanctuary for all the children (birth to twelve years old), youth (thirteen years old to eighteen years old), and vulnerable adults (persons age eighteen or older who are mentally, physically, or psychologically challenged and are unable to make responsible legal decisions about their welfare) in our care, protecting those who are powerless and empowering them through faith and trust. During each baptism of an infant, child, or adult into this community of faith, the members of Northside pledge to uphold that person in Jesus Christ and to teach, strengthen, and support individuals' relationships with the Body of Christ.

Therefore, the members of Northside are committed to the safety, welfare, and protection of all children - ages birth to 18 –year old, (hereafter “minors”) and vulnerable adults, participating in the activities and programs of this church as well as those adults, whether volunteers or employees of Northside, involved in the care and nurture of our children, youth, and vulnerable adults. This policy is also intended to safeguard any individual who is developmentally, mentally, or physically disabled, regardless of his or her age.

Northside recognizes that certain people have exceptional talents for teaching and supporting the growth and development of children, youth, and vulnerable adults and wants to encourage them to use these gifts. At the same time, however, the church places certain criteria on those adults who choose to serve in this capacity.

This policy addresses the preventable risk of any form of neglect, abuse, or harassment, whether physical, emotional, sexual, ritual, financial or verbal, by any of the paid staff (including NMP teachers) or volunteers of this church (hereafter “workers”) while on church property or while engaged in church-sponsored activities or programs. Additionally, we are called to stand not in judgment, but in compassion for each other. We believe that any person who has been accused of committing an act of abuse can expect due process, our prayers, and acceptance as a child of God.

Therefore, all Northside sponsored activities and programs, regardless of location, involving minors and/or vulnerable adults, will be subject to the following policy:

* At all times a minimum of two workers will be assigned to supervise or lead all group activities involving minors and/or vulnerable adults.
* *A Parent Permission Form* must be completed and signed for all programs and activities outside the regular classes and meetings on campus for minors. These would include, but not be limited to: overnight lock-ins, off-campus service trips, off-campus fellowship activities, and out-of-town trips.
* A signed *Parent Permission Form* must be completed any time a minor and single adult are in a situation where a second adult is not present, such as (but not limited to) a tutoring situation or mentoring relationship.
* Ordinarily, no person shall be able to serve as a volunteer leader (worker) of minors and/or vulnerable adults until such person has been an active member of the church for six months (a person may volunteer in tandem with an approved worker before that six-month requirement is reached as long as all other requirements have been met), has completed a *Paid Staff/Volunteer Information Form*, a security background check has been completed, and has attended a Safe Sanctuary training.  The exception to this rule is coaches in our recreational sports leagues, workers for VBS, and workers in Metro Atlanta Project (MAP).  The exceptions are as followed:
  + Coaches will not be able to serve until they have completed a security background check and Safe Sanctuary training.
  + VBS and MAP workers (who will never be alone with a youth or child and will always work in tandem with an approved worker) will not be able to serve until they have completed an amended Safe Sanctuary training (related to their specific ministry area).

**Prohibited Behavior**

The following behaviors are prohibited for all individuals working with children, youth, or vulnerable adults. This is not an exhaustive list of Prohibitive Behaviors:

* Threatening or inflicting physical injury to a child, youth or vulnerable adult (other than by accidental means)
* Committing any sexual offense against a child, youth or vulnerable adult or engaging in any sexual contact with a child, youth or vulnerable adult
* Making any kind of sexual advance, making a request for sexual favors, or engaging in verbal, visual, or physical conduct of a sexual nature
* The presence or possession of obscene or pornographic materials at any function of Northside Church, on-site or off-site
* Being under the influence or in the possession of any illegal or illicit drug or alcohol while leading or participating in a function for minors sponsored by Northside.

**Worker Enlistment and Screening**

1. Volunteer workers in the preschool, children, and youth areas of ministry (to include graded choir programs, the youth program, Sunday School and any other position which involves contact with minors) with the exception of VBS,MAP, and Sports and Recreation workers/coaches will be required to be members for a minimum of six months before serving in these areas.
2. All workers must be 18 years of age or older. Younger persons may assist adults, but they may not take the place of adult workers. The church may employ responsible teenagers (under the age of 18) in nursery or other positions with and under the direct supervision of an approved adult worker.
3. All persons working and being paid in these positions will be required to complete a *Paid Staff/Volunteer Information Form.*  In addition to providing information necessary for security background checks, this Agreement states that the worker has received a copy of *Northside’s Safe Sanctuary Policy*, has read and understands it, and will comply with the guidelines set forth in it.
4. Security background checks for all workers will be conducted by the Executive Director with the assistance of a third party company enlisted for the purpose of providing confidential background checks.  The written results of the security background checks will initially be reviewed by the Executive Director.  After this initial review, if the Executive Director determines that further review should be made, the Executive Director will consult with the appropriate program staff.
5. Without the written permission of the worker (and except as may be required by law), the information contained in the *Paid Staff/Volunteer Information Form*, the results of the security background check, will be disclosed only to the persons designated in the previous paragraph.
6. The Executive Director will maintain a locked storage cabinet in the church for all *Paid Staff/Volunteer Information Forms* and the results of the background check.  The results of the security background checks will be destroyed periodically if required by the guidelines mandated by the appropriate local agency.
7. Whether disclosed voluntarily or by the results of the security background check, the following terms will automatically disqualify an individual from participating in the leadership or sponsorship of any church activity or program for minors: Any indictment alleging the offence of, or any conviction for: murder; aggravated assault; sexual abuse (rape); aggravated sexual assault; injury to a child; incest; indecency with a child; inducing sexual conduct or sexual performance of a child; possession or promotion of child pornography; the sale, distribution, or display of harmful material to a minor; employment harmful to a child; abandonment or endangerment of a child
8. All other convictions or charges for any other crimes not listed above will be reviewed by the Senior Pastor, Associate Pastor/Director of Student Ministry and/or Children’s Ministries, and the Executive Director to determine eligibility for that person’s service in ministry areas involving minors.
9. In the event of a background check with negative results, the worker will be notified by the Senior Pastor or the Executive Director.
10. If an applicant disputes information that appears in his or her criminal history record transcript, he or she may appeal through the appropriate legal authority.
11. Staff workers and volunteers shall be allowed to review their security background check and transcript at the church, but under no circumstances shall the church allow the worker to retain their transcript.
12. Guest speakers approved by Executive Director are exempt from the security background check and training requirements.  It is expected that a guest speaker would not be with minors without an approved worker present.

**Recommitment and Re-screening**

1. Each fall, all staff and volunteers (workers) will be required to review the current *Northside’s Safe Sanctuary Policy* and sign a *Recommitment Acknowledgement Statement*.
2. Following initial screening, active volunteer workers will be re-screened with security background checks on a rotating basis so that volunteer workers are screened a minimum of every five years.  Paid workers will be screened annually within Children’s Ministries, Northside Methodist Preschool, Student Ministry, Sports & Recreation. All additional staff will be screened every five years.

**Training**

1. Training for Adults
   1. All employees and workers are required to attend a Safe Sanctuary training.  This training will include the following:
      * The need for the Safe Sanctuary Policy
      * Definitions of abuse (physical, emotional, sexual, ritual, and financial)
      * Preconditions for child sexual abuse to occur
      * Definition of inappropriate conduct
      * Northside’s policies governing working with minors
      * Procedures for responding to allegations of abuse from a child
      * Civil and criminal consequences of misconduct
      * Procedures for reporting observed or suspected misconduct
      * Georgia statutes regarding Child Protective Services
      * Procedures for reporting concerns
      * Northside’s procedures for responding to accusations
   2. Following successful completion of the above training and approval of their application, staff and volunteer may be deemed eligible to work with children and youth at Northside. This eligibility must be renewed annually as described in Section 4.0 of this policy.
2. Training for Children and Youth   
   Parents bear the primary responsibility for teaching their children about child and youth protection and safety issues. Nonetheless, from time to time, Northside may offer age-appropriate educational opportunities for children and youth to provide them with necessary information about child and youth protection issues, including their right to be free from unwelcome and inappropriate touching or remarks, how to report their concerns, and Northside's policies regarding their safety. Parents will be notified of any such educational opportunities and may have their children/youth participate if they so desire.

**Guidelines for Workers in Children's Programs**

1. General Guidelines
   1. Two (2) approved adults should be present at all times in each room where minors are present.  It is strongly recommended that the two adults not be related; if the two adults are related, a third, approved adult should be present.
   2. Whenever possible the doors to classrooms shall be kept open or, in the case of rooms with Dutch doors, the top half of the door shall be kept open.  The doors to the classroom may be closed only if there are windows from the classroom into the hallway with an unobstructed view of the classroom.
   3. Classes shall remain in their assigned spaces.  If there is to be a change, the Associate Pastor/Director of Children’s Ministries must be informed and approve the change.
   4. Care shall be taken to ensure that young children do not leave a class or ministry activity unattended.
   5. On occasion, a child may need to be removed from a group for behavioral or social reasons.  If the child and the worker move to a separate room, the door must remain open.  In the case of rooms with Dutch doors, the top half of the door shall be kept open.
   6. Restroom supervision
      1. Workers will make sure suspicious or unknown individuals are not occupying the restroom before allowing children to use the facilities.
      2. Workers will stand in the doorway while children are using the restroom. This policy allows privacy for the children and protection for the workers (i.e., not being alone with a child).  Whenever possible, children should be sent in pairs.
      3. If workers are assisting younger children, doors to the facility must remain open.
      4. Workers will always use proper supervision when children are using public bathrooms to ensure their safety.
      5. Workers may change diapers if done in an open space.
2. Receiving and Dismissing of Children from Classes, Events, Care-Giving, etc .
   1. Only the approved staff and volunteers and parents/guardians may be in the classroom with the children.
   2. Children left in the care of workers for classes or other activities are to be checked-in and checked-out by a parent/guardian or other person appropriately designated by the parent/guardian. Under no circumstances shall a child be released from a classroom or event to anyone other than the parent, guardian, or the designated individual.
   3. Children will be checked-in by signing the child’s name on a clipboard, noting where the parent will be and/or how the parents can be reached (e.g. cell phone or church provided beeper), and completing a name tag for each child.  Some classes will have sticker type name tags others will have laminated name tags.
   4. Children will be checked-out by the parent, guardian, and/or designated individual by signing the clipboard.
3. One-On-One Meetings Between Workers and Minor
   1. Any one-on-one meeting involving a minor must be conducted with the door open.
   2. Planned one-on-one lunches must be held in public places and may only occur if:
      * proper approval has been given by the parent or guardian
      * and the Associate Pastor/Director of Children’s Ministries/Director of Student Ministries or other program staff member has been notified.
   3. At no time shall a youth worker pursue a dating relationship with a minor.
   4. Unplanned contacts between a minor and the Associate Pastor/Director of Children’s Ministries/Director of Student Ministries or other workers shall, insofar as possible, be conducted under the same rules as planned activities.
   5. It shall not be a violation of this policy for the Associate Minister of Children’s Ministries/Director of Student Ministries to talk with a minor in the Minister's office with the door closed when the minor has requested the closed meeting provided:
      * The door is closed for a relatively brief period of time
      * The Associate Minister of Children’s Ministries/Director of Student Ministries informs another staff member about the meeting
      * Such meetings are infrequent
4. Parent Permission Form
   1. A signed *Parent/Guardian Permission Form* must be completed and signed for all programs and activities outside the regular classes and meetings on campus. These would include, but not be limited to: overnight lock-ins; off campus field trips; off campus fellowship activities.
   2. A signed *Parent/Guardian Permission Form* must be completed any time a minor and single adult are in a situation where a second adult is not present, such as (but not limited to) a tutoring situation or mentoring relationship.

**Guidelines for Workers in Youth Programs**

1. General Guidelines
   1. Two (2) approved adults should be present at all times in each room where youth are present.  A specific ratio of leaders to youth is not suggested; instead, the ratio shall be appropriate for the specific activity. The youth's parent or guardian must grant any exception to the two-adult rule and the Associate Pastor/Director of Student Ministries shall be contacted in advance and advised that permission has been obtained.
   2. Whenever possible the door to classrooms shall be kept open.
   3. Classes shall remain in their assigned spaces. If there is to be a change, the Associate Pastor/Director of Student Ministries must be informed and approve the change.
   4. The youth will not be allowed to leave the ministry activity unattended.
   5. Back rubs, neck rubs, massages, kissing, or similar contact is not allowed between youth and adults.
2. One-on-One Meetings Between Workers and Youth
   1. Any one-on-one meeting involving a youth must be conducted with the door open.
   2. Planned one-on-one lunches must be held in public places and may only occur if:
      * proper approval has been given by the parent or guardian
      * and the Associate Pastor/Director of Student Ministries or other program staff member has been notified.
   3. At no time shall a youth worker pursue a dating relationship with a youth.
   4. Unplanned contacts between a youth and the Associate Pastor/Director of Student Ministries or other workers shall, insofar as possible, be conducted under the same rules as planned activities.
   5. It shall not be a violation of this policy for the Associate Minister of Student Ministries to talk with a youth in the Minister's office with the door closed when the youth has requested the closed meeting provided:
      * The door is closed for a relatively brief period of time
      * The Associate Pastor/Director of Student Ministries informs another staff member about the meeting
      * Such meetings are infrequent
3. Parent Permission Form
   1. A completed and signed *Parent/Guardian Permission Form* must be completed and signed for all programs and activities outside the regular classes and meetings on campus. These would include, but not be limited to: overnight lock-ins; off-campus service/field trips; off-campus fellowship activities and out-of-town trips.
   2. A signed *Parent/Guardian Permission Form* must be completed any time a minor and an individual adult are in a situation where a second adult is not present, such as (but not limited to) a tutoring situation or mentoring relationship.  Exceptions are listed in One-on-One Meetings, section 2.5

**Driving R*ules***

1. *All activities outside the* church in which children and youth participate require the completion of a signed *Parent/Guardian Permission Form* and *Waiver and Indemnity Agreement*.
2. When one vehicle is used for an event, the two-adult rule still applies unless parental permission is obtained prior to the trip.  When several vehicles are taken for an event, keeping the other vehicles in sight is an acceptable substitute for the two-adult rule.

**Overnight Trip Rules**

1. *Parent/Guardian Permission Forms* and *Medical Consent* *Forms* must be completed prior to all trips. The two-adult rule must be followed throughout the trip with any exceptions clearly stated and approved in advance by the parent or guardian. The total number of adults on each trip will be adjusted according to the requirements of the planned activities.  Under no circumstances can one adult alone take or accompany minors on an overnight outing.
2. Sleeping arrangements should provide for youth of the same sex to sleep together and adults of the same sex to sleep together. Ordinarily adults would not share rooms with youth; under no circumstances can an individual minor share a room with an individual adult.

**Safe Sanctuary Committee**

1. The *Safe Sanctuary Committee* is a committee of the Church Council and is composed of three members appointed by the Church Council. The *Safe Sanctuary Committee* works with the appropriate staff members to assure compliance with this Policy, including appropriate recordkeeping.  Additionally, the committee will secure the attorney and counselors for the *Response Team* and disseminate the *Response Team’s* contact information to appropriate staff and workers.
2. Members of the *Safe Sanctuary Committee* shall serve three-year “staggered” terms.  A chairperson of the committee shall be elected by its members.  Committee members shall serve a maximum of two consecutive terms.  After two consecutive terms, a member shall be eligible to serve again following two years of inactivity.  No member who is currently working directly with children and youth at the church or who serves on the Children's Ministries Committee or the Student Ministries Committee may serve on the *Safe Sanctuary Committee*.

**Response Team**

A *Response Team* shall be created to respond to any allegations.  The team should be comprised of qualified individuals who understand the issues of confidentiality:

* The Senior Pastor
* Executive Director
* Staff Parish Relationship Committee Chair
* An attorney for the church
* Representatives for both the alleged victim and the accused person

**Reporting Policy Violations**

1. In order to maintain an environment free of destructive acts toward all minors,  the paid staff, parents, and volunteer workers of Northside must be aware of their individual responsibility to report any questionable circumstances, observation, act, omission, or situation thought to be in violation of this Policy.
2. Anyone personally witnessing any occurrence of or encountering a situation which presents suspicion of the occurrence of a Prohibited Behavior as stated in this policy is required to report the situation to an individual on the *Response Team* immediately after the occurrence.  The reporting individual will be asked to complete a *Suspected Abuse Incident Report*.
3. Any report of child abuse made by a minor about their care by a parent, guardian, youth, adult, or Northside staff employee or volunteer, despite how unlikely such report may seem, must be relayed to the *Response Team* immediately after the occurrence.  The reporting individual will be asked to complete a *Suspected Abuse Incident Report* noting the words originally spoken by the minor and the minor's conduct and demeanor observed concerning the incident.
4. In the case of any occurrence of a violation of the policy, the following steps should be taken to insure the security of the minor involved and to protect against physical, emotional, or psychological injury to all persons involved:
   * Personally secure the safety of the minor(s)
   * Report the incident immediately to the designated person(s) on the *Response Team*
   * Do not leave the minor(s) unsupervised while reporting the incident
   * Under no circumstances should the accused be given access to the alleged victim.
   * Do not personally confront the alleged or accused violator of  the policy
   * Allow the designated person from the *Response Team* to provide you with instructions for reporting of the incident to the parents or guardian of the minor(s)
   * The Senior Pastor or Executive Pastor will be solely responsible for all communications on behalf of the church
   * Report the abuse incident to the Georgia Division of Family and Children Services (DFCS) or the police department, in the presence of the Senior Pastor, Executive Pastor or Church Administrator.

**Consequences of Violations**

1. When a person is accused of committing a Prohibited Behavior, the Senior Pastor or Executive Director shall notify the accused individual.  This notification shall not take place until the safety of the alleged victim is secured.
2. The accused should be relieved temporarily of his/her duties until determination of the allegation has been made by the church, law enforcement, or child protection agency.
3. Any person found guilty of a Prohibited Behavior shall be prohibited from future participation in all church sponsored activities and programs with minors. If a person is a paid staff member such conduct may also result in termination of employment.
4. In the event of an unsubstantiated allegation, the Senior Pastor or the Executive Pastor will work with the individual to determine a course of action with the best interest of all parties involved.

**Failure to Timely Report a Prohibited Act**

Failure to timely report a Prohibited Behavior to the designated person shall be considered a procedural violation of this Safe Sanctuary Policy and shall be grounds for termination of employment of a paid staff member or employee and suspension and dismissal from participation in all children and youth activities and programs of the Northside by any person.

**Exceptions to this Policy**

*Any exception to these policies and procedures shall be approved by the Church Council after consultation with legal authority and liability insurer.*