RICHMOND UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

SAFE GATHERINGS POLICY FOR CARE AND PROTECTION FROM ABUSE OF CHILDREN, YOUTH AND VULNERABLE ADULTS

Adopted by RUMC Servant Leadership Team on ______

Richmond United Methodist Church, as a member of The Missouri Conference of the United Methodist Church is committed to providing safe places of worship and fellowship to everyone they serve. As part of that commitment, they are offering Safe Gatherings as a resource for staff and volunteers in this important area.

Safe Gatherings is an online abuse prevention program that screens and educates staff and volunteers to help prevent abuse of children, youth and vulnerable adults. When employees and volunteers, who are trained about the best practices when working with vulnerable populations, know the behaviors of potential abusers, recognize the signs of abuse and know how to handle reporting, they are better equipped to prevent abuse.
Upon successful completion of the Safe Gatherings application, background and reference checks, and online training program, each applicant will receive documentation of approval valid for three years, and will have continued access to the online training program for one year.

The Missouri Conference is committed to this program and is supplementing half the cost of the program through December 2023 (Regular price: $45). The price per applicant for the individual church program available through the Conference is $22.50. This includes:

- Processing of two electronic references
- National criminal background check
- 7-year multi-county of residence background check
- National and state of residence Sex Offender Registry check
- Applicant tracking for church administrators
- 1.5-hour online abuse prevention and boundary awareness training

To begin the program, visit: www.safegatherings.com and click on “Get Started” in the top menu.
MISSION
The mission of Safe Gatherings is to screen and educate staff and volunteers to help prevent abuse of children, youth and vulnerable adults.
You can turn on the news or pick up a newspaper and see churches, schools and other organizations persecuted in the press for abuse scandals. Safe Gatherings is an effective but simple process to provide additional protection.
When staff and volunteers undergo several layers of background checks, reference checks and a comprehensive abuse prevention training, they will know just what to do, what to look for and how to protect those they serve.

VISION
A world in which all children, youth and vulnerable adults are protected and feel safe.
This vision is a lofty goal, but it must be accomplished and it can be accomplished with all of us working together as a team. The ultimate goal is that all teams within the Richmond UMC operation, no matter the size, will take the steps to provide safer environments.

THE TECHNOLOGY
Parents trust us to protect their children so that they know their children are safe wherever they are – in church or in an activity involving the church. Part of that trust is the security in knowing that all volunteers and staff working with children have been properly vetted.
The Safe Gatherings system is comprehensive. It integrates abuse prevention and boundary awareness training with background checks and reference checks for all staff and volunteers working with children, youth and vulnerable adults. When staff and volunteers are trained to identify potential abusers, recognize the signs of abuse and know how to handle reporting abuse, they are better equipped to work together as a team to help prevent abuse. Training is all done online and is easy to go through the process.

RICHMOND UMC SAFE GATHERINGS POLICY

For the Protection of Children, Youth and Adults from Vulnerable Populations

Richmond United Methodist Church is determined to minimize the risk of abuse to participants in the activities of Richmond UMC.

POLICY

“Let the children come to me and do not stop them, for it is to such as these that the kingdom of heaven belongs.” (Matthew 19:14).

Scripture and our United Methodist tradition inform us in our belief that God values all human life – perhaps children most of all.
The Social Principles of the United Methodist Church states, “… In particular, children must be protected from economic, physical, emotional and sexual exploitation and abuse.” (¶162.C The 2016 Book of Discipline, pg. 121) The Book of Resolutions encourages all conferences to become involved in the prevention of the physical and sexual abuse of children (#3084.B. 2016 Book of Resolutions, p. 182-184). The 2016 Book of Discipline names child abuse, sexual abuse, sexual misconduct including the use or possession of pornography, and harassment, including but not limited to racial and/or sexual harassment, racial or gender discrimination, as chargeable offenses for clergy and lay members (¶2702, 2016 Book of Discipline, pg. 789).

Therefore, it shall be the policy and covenant of Richmond United Methodist Church, a member of the Missouri Conference of the UMC, to prohibit and work to prevent physical or sexual abuse against children, youth and adults from vulnerable populations involved in any ministry sponsored by Richmond UMC. Further, we are called to minister to those persons who are experiencing abuse and to those who have been victims of abuse in the past. To that end, we covenant to be aware of our responsibilities and to act justly in the best interest of those who have been abused or those who are most vulnerable to abuse.

SCOPE
This policy and its provisions shall apply to all staff persons, volunteer or paid, lay or clergy, who have any direct contact with children and/or youth and/or adults from vulnerable
populations in any activities or events sponsored by Richmond United Methodist Church.

**DEFINITIONS**

**Direct Contact:** With children, youth or adults from vulnerable populations is defined as the care, supervision, guidance, transportation or control of such persons or routine interaction with children, youth or adults from vulnerable populations.

**Physical Abuse:** Physical abuse is any act or omission of an act that endangers a person’s physical or mental health. Physical abuse may result from punishment that is overly punitive or inappropriate to the individual’s age or condition. In addition, physical abuse may result from purposeful acts or intentional failure to act that pose serious danger to the physical health of a child, youth or adult from vulnerable populations.

**Sexual Abuse:** Sexual abuse means unwanted physical conduct of a sexual nature, sexual contact or sexualized behavior and may include, by example, touching, fondling, sexual intercourse and other exploitation or use of another person for purposes of sexual desires. Sexual abuse includes, but is not limited to: rape, sexual battery, aggravated sexual battery, lewd and lascivious behavior, enticement of a child, indecent solicitation of a child, aggravated indecent solicitation of a child or indecent liberties with a child.
**Staff Persons:** Staff includes any clergy person, any paid employee of Richmond UMC, any staff member of the Missouri Conference or district, and any paid employee of any group, committee, team or agency of the Missouri Conference, District or outside group (such as Boy Scouts) who has the care/supervision of participants in any activities or events sponsored by Richmond United Methodist Church.

**Volunteer:** is any non-clergy, lay worker who has the care/supervision of a participant at an event. This may include paid staff members of another church, or outside group (such as Boy Scouts).

**Participants:** Participants are children and youth who are registered, enrolled, attending or otherwise participating in an activity, event or school sponsored by Richmond UMC, the Missouri Conference or District. Participants can also be persons over 18 years of age who are considered to be Vulnerable adults (see below).

**Adult from Vulnerable Populations:** Persons, 18 years of age or older, who are unable to protect their own interest due to a substantial mental or functional impairment, or for whom a guardian has been appointed.

**Certification Authority:** The Certification Authority will be the Safe Gatherings Coordinator, the Director of Congregational
Excellence, a designated District Superintendent and a Conference Chancellor.

**Crisis Management Team:** The Crisis Management Team is made up of the current Pastor of Richmond United Methodist Church, the Bishop of the Missouri Conference of the UMC, the Northwest District Superintendent, the Director of Communications for the Missouri Conference, the Conference Chancellor and the Director of Congregational Excellence.

**Training:** The Missouri Conference has partnered with Safe Gatherings to implement training procedures for all individual who work with children, youth and adults from vulnerable populations at Richmond United Methodist Church, and in church activities and events outside of the church building. No individual shall have any direct contact with children, youth or members of adults from vulnerable populations until they have completed the Safe Gatherings training program. Certified individuals must be at least 18 years of age.

**Screening:** Prior to certification, applicants will complete an online application/consent form. By completing the form online, the applicant will give permission for a background check and reference check to be completed.

A lay reference and clergy reference will be provided by each applicant. Clergy will provide a reference by the Northwest
District Superintendent. References must have known the applicant at least two years and not be related to the applicant.

If Safe Gatherings does not approve an applicant for any reason, the RUMC Safe Gatherings Coordinator will notify the Richmond UMC pastor. Richmond United Methodist Church reserves the right to turn away individuals for volunteer or paid service who does not pass the background and reference checks and/or the online training.

If the applicant is found to have been involved in any activity in which the applicant abused or exploited children, youth or adults from vulnerable populations, the applicant will not be approved. Any conviction of a crime against children, youth or adults from vulnerable populations shall disqualify the applicant. A person who has been convicted as a sex offender will not be certified. Affirmative responses to the following questions relating to crimes will prompt a personal review of an application:

- Crimes against children,
- Rape, sexual or physical assault
- Possession or use of drugs, and
- Suspension of a drivers license within the last five years

**Certification:** Certification is valid for three years from date of approval. Applicants must be 18 years or older to be certified to serve at Richmond United Methodist Church. Certified applicants will be notified of his/her approval by email, as will
the pastor and Safe Gatherings Coordinator. If not approved, the applicant and the pastor will be notified by email.

**Revocation of Certification:** The pastor of Richmond United Methodist and/or the chairperson of the RUMC SPRC reserves the right to revoke an individual’s certification at any time, same as does the Missouri Conference Safe Gatherings certification authority.

All forms, background checks and a copy of the Safe Gatherings certification will be kept as part of a staff or volunteer’s confidential file.

**Reporting of Incidents:** Any staff member or volunteer of Richmond Untied Methodist Church who has reasonable cause to suspect that a child has been or may be subjected to abuse or neglect, or who observes circumstances which would result in abuse or neglect, must immediately report such facts to the pastor. If the pastor is unavailable, the report must be made to the chairperson of the Staff Parish Relations Committee (SPRC). The person receiving such report must document the report.

A call to the hotline is required to be made by staff or volunteers if there is reasonable cause to suspect that the abuse of a participant has occurred. When the necessity of reporting occurs, the protection of children, youth and vulnerable adults is paramount. Reporting should occur in the following order:
1. The State of Missouri through the Division of Family Services through the Missouri Child Abuse Hotline at: 1-800-392-3738.
2. The Missouri Annual Conference of the United Methodist Church through the Northwest District Superintendent at: 816-649-5015 and through the office of the resident bishop at: 573-441-1770.
3. The church’s insurance agent (GuideOne Insurance)
4. The church’s attorney.

Notification of abuse or neglect must be made as immediately as possible. Notification of sexual abuse must be made to the State of Missouri within 24 hours of receiving the report of such sexual abuse.

Statement to the Media: If an alleged incident occurs, the pastor or his/her designated individual will serve as spokesperson for all media requests. If the alleged incident involves the Pastor, then the chairperson of the Staff Parish Relations Committee or his/her designated individual will serve as the spokesperson. The following is a suggested media response:

“We here at Richmond United Methodist Church are saddened by the allegations that have been brought. We have attempted to create an environment here that is welcoming and safe, whereby all persons might learn of the Good News of Jesus Christ.”
We are cooperating fully with local officials who are investigating this incident. Our District Superintendent’s office has also been notified and an investigation will be conducted through that office as well. If you desire further information, we will help you get in touch with our District Superintendent.

This is all we can comment on at this time.”

RICHMOND UMC OPERATIONAL PROCEDURES
1. The rules and procedures of the Missouri Annual Conference of the United Methodist Church always prevail over the church’s stated policies if they should come into conflict.
2. There are to never be one-on-one meetings between staff/volunteers and children/youth/vulnerable adults.
3. Individual programs will develop and implement sign-in, sign-out procedures to provide additional security measures for those children third grade and younger.
4. At least two adults must be present at all events utilizing Richmond UMC facilities that involve children, youth and vulnerable adults. In addition, at any church event off-site involving children, youth and vulnerable adults, at least two adults must be present. Adults are defined as those individuals 18 years of age and older.
5. When on field trips, young children will not be identified with name tags. Tags can be worn that identify the group only.
6. When an event requires that children/youth travel with an adult other than their parent or guardian, written permission must be obtained in advance for each child/youth. An Event Permission Form must be signed, dated and collected for the specific event. All children/youth who regularly participate in our church’s ministries must have an Emergency Treatment Permission Form on file in the church office and in possession of the adults in charge.

7. When a traveling group contains members of both genders, supervision must also be provided by both genders.

8. Drivers must be at least 21 years of age and copies of their drivers license and proof of insurance must be on file in the church office. In addition, all passengers (including the driver) are expected to wear a seatbelt. Two adults are always required when transporting children/youth.

9. There will be separate sleeping areas for males and females. No adult may share a hotel/motel/cabin room or tent with a youth or child unless the adult is the parent of the youth/child with whom he or she shares the room/tent.

10. The use of alcohol or illegal drugs or abuse of prescription drugs at any Richmond UMC sponsored event involving children, youth or vulnerable adult is prohibited. The use of alcohol products by adults while supervising children and youth is strongly discouraged.

In summary, the completion of Safe Gatherings background check, reference check and online course and approval will serve as staff member and/or volunteer’s record and
acknowledgement of the policies and procedures, standards and reporting objectives of the Safe Gatherings policy of Richmond United Methodist Church.

Signed  
DS • Miller  
7-27-20
Servant Leadership Team Chairman

Signed  
Rev. Dr. Cathy G. Myers  
7-27-20
The Rev. Dr. Cathy G. Myers, Pastor of RUMC

RUMC Safe Gatherings Policy Rev. 2020