



Safe Sanctuary Policy

Safe Sanctuary-Child Abuse Policy
Aldersgate United Methodist Church
Shelby, North Carolina

The General Conference of the United Methodist Church, in April 1996, adopted a resolution aimed at reducing the risk of child abuse in the church.

Jesus, said, “Whoever welcomes [a] child...welcomes me” (Matthew 18:5). Children are our present and our future, our hope, our teachers, our inspiration. They are full participants in the life of the church and the realm of God.

Jesus also said, “If any of you put a stumbling block before one of these little ones...it would be better for you if a great millstone were fastened around your neck and you were drowned in the depth of the sea” (Matthew 18:6)

Our Christian faith calls us to offer both hospitality and protection to the little ones, the children. The Social Principles of The United Methodist Church state that “children must be protected from economic, physical, emotional and sexual exploitation and abuse” (para. 162C).

Tragically, churches have not always been safe places for children. Child sex abuse, exploitation, and ritual abuse occur in churches, both large and small, urban and rural. The problem cuts across all economic, cultural, and racial lines. It is real, and it appears to be increasing. Most annual conferences can cite specific incidents of child sexual abuse and exploitation within churches. Virtually every congregation has among its members adult survivors of early sexual trauma.

NOTE: Ritual abuse refers to abusive acts committed as part of ceremonies or rites usually associated with cults.

Such incidents are devastating to all who are involved: the child, the family, the local church and its leaders. Increasingly, churches are torn apart by the legal, emotional, and monetary consequences of litigation following allegations of abuse.

God calls us to make our churches safe places, protecting children and other vulnerable persons from sexual and ritual abuse. God calls us to create communities of faith where children and adults grow safe and strong.

Thus, in covenant with all United Methodist congregations, Aldersgate United Methodist Church adopts this policy for the prevention of child abuse in our church.

Purpose

Our purpose for establishing this Child Abuse Prevention Policy and accompanying procedures is to demonstrate our total and unwavering commitment to the physical, emotional and spiritual safety of all our children, youth and vulnerable adults.

Covenant Statement

The Aldersgate United Methodist Church hereby pledges to conduct the ministry of Jesus Christ in ways that assure the physical, emotional safety, and spiritual growth of all of our children, youth and vulnerable adults as well as all of our workers with children, youth and vulnerable adults. We will follow reasonable safety measures when selecting and recruiting workers; we will implement appropriate operational procedures in all areas of programming and care; we will train our workers with children and youth on our procedures and policies; and we will have a clearly defined procedure for reporting a suspected incident of abuse consistent with North Carolina State Law.

I. Staff Recruitment and Selection Guidelines

A. Age

In recruiting and hiring volunteers and paid staff to work with children and youth in any position of authority, they must be at least 21 years of age and at least 5 years older than the age of the persons they are working to serve. In certain circumstances, 18-year-old volunteers may be used so long as they are accompanied by a 21-year-old, and they are at least 5 years older than the oldest child they are serving.

B. Workers with Children

Aldersgate United Methodist Church will not use anyone as a worker for children/youth or vulnerable adults in the church unless they have completed a satisfactory background check. In the case of paid staff workers, the applicant may have been a member of another United Methodist Church at least (6) months prior to employment.

C. Application

Applicants must complete and sign an application and the related waivers giving permission to check references and background information.

D. Reference Checks

Church leaders will check three references for each primary worker. The references will be done by phone, mail, or in person. The necessary forms will be filled out by the person conducting the reference check.

E. Background Checks

Criminal background checks shall be made of all clergy, paid staff, and volunteers who have supervisory program responsibility for youth (e.g. youth group leaders) and all other church employees, to the extent permitted by law, prior to employment/participation to determine current or historic child abuse or sexual misconduct, criminal records, violent or pedophilic behavior.

F. Prior Convictions

Individuals who have been convicted of physical or sexual abuse or neglect may not work in any church-sponsored activity or program for preschoolers, children, youth or vulnerable adults.

G. Interview

All applicants must be interviewed for suitability for the work they desire to do. Interviews will be conducted by the leader of the program in which the applicant will work, or by other persons designated by the program leader. A team of interviews may be used. Church policy and guidelines should be discussed during the interview.

H. Child Abuse Survivor Applicants

Adult survivors of childhood physical or sexual abuse need the love and acceptance of this church family. A person's experience with abuse and their recovery process may be pertinent to their suitability as youth and children's ministry workers. Applicants who are survivors of abuse should discuss this in confidence with the person who conducts the confidential interview. If an applicant is uncomfortable doing so, he/she may have the interview conducted by a pastor.

I. Confidentiality of Information

The church will keep confidential all information received in the applicant selection process. Selection information will be marked as such and stored in a locked location with limited access afforded only to church staff and others with a need to know. The Senior Pastor to families with youth and the Minister of Children and Youth are responsible for the implementation of these policies as well as the maintenance of confidential records.

J. Required Forms and Signatures

In addition to staff application and reference forms, all applicants will sign the "Authorization and Request for Criminal Background Check" and the "Participation Covenant Statement" forms as part of the application process.

II. Staff Supervision Guidelines

All meetings of children and/or youth affiliated with Aldersgate United Methodist Church will be governed by the following guidelines:

A. Two Adult Rule

Two approved adults must be present at all times. This applies to classroom activities and when transporting children and youth. Whenever possible, teachers will be assigned in teams of two or more per Sunday School hour to every class of children or youth. Concerted efforts will be made to recruit sufficient numbers of volunteer teachers/leaders to permit such team teaching. Other church sponsored or community groups of children or youth who meet at the church should have two or more leaders present whenever possible. When feasible, both male and female leaders would be present. If the group stays overnight at the church, or if a church sponsored group leaves the premises, two or more leaders must be present and must include at least one male and female if the group is mixed gender.

B. Open Door Policy

Further protection for the children requires that an open-door policy be followed. This policy shall state that the parents of the children served, the clergy, administrative and professional staff of the church have the right to visit and observe the children's/youth activity, classroom, or church-sponsored program at any time, unannounced.

C. Outside Access

There must be access to a phone or cell phone when groups are at or away from the church facility. The church office or authorized church representative will be given this number prior to the group's departure from church property.

D. Doors and Windows

All classroom and office doors will have a window or visibility from hallway or remain open while occupied. Windows will be kept free from adornment and kept locked at all times. Doors that do not have visibility from the outside will be replaced with doors with a window when replacement is needed.

E. Individual Counseling

One-on-one interactions are sometimes necessary and appropriate but care must be taken that they be conducted in an environment that provides visibility by other adults. If at all possible, another adult is to have knowledge of staff members' whereabouts and with whom they are meeting. Children and youth receiving individual counseling should be told they are free to discuss any aspects of the counseling process with a parent or other adult, especially if they are uncomfortable about anything that occurs in counseling. All incidents of suspected abuse and neglect revealed during the session will be reported in accordance with North Carolina State and Federal Laws.

F. Touch

Physical affection should be appropriate to the age of the child or youth. (For example, it is generally appropriate for a four-year-old to sit in a nursery worker's lap and give a kiss on the cheek, but it is not appropriate for a teenage and youth leader to behave this way.) Touching should be initiated by the child or youth. It should be a response to the child's need for comforting, encouragement, or affection. It should not be based upon the adult's emotional need.

Ideally, touching and affection should only be given when in the presence of other children's ministry or youth workers. It is much less likely that touches will be inappropriate or misconstrued as such when two adult workers are present and the touching is open to observation. This is especially important when diapering a baby or helping a young child change clothes or use the restroom.

Touching behavior should not give even the appearance of wrongdoing. As ministry workers our behavior must foster trust at all times; it should be above reproach.

A child's preference not to be touched should be respected. Do not force affection upon a reluctant child. Church workers are responsible to protect children under their supervision from inappropriate touching by others.

Church workers must promptly discuss inappropriate touching or other questionable behavior by other workers with their ministry leader, staff member, or pastor.

G. Outings Away from Church Property

All children and youth participating in out-of-town and over-night outings must have written consent. (Appendix C. Waiver and Release Forms) There must be access to a phone or cell

phone when groups are away from the church property. In no circumstance is one adult (other than a parent) to take a child or children on an overnight outing alone. On youth overnight outings, there will be the best effort to ideally maintain a 1:7 staff/youth supervision ratio. Female staff will supervise female youth in their sleeping quarters and male staff will supervise male youth. Ideally, married couples will not stay together but observe the female/female and male/male sleeping arrangements. With the exception of a parent/child combination, a staff and youth will not occupy the same bed or sleeping bag.

H. Classroom Discipline

All teachers and workers will use the following discipline measures:

1. If a child is behaving inappropriately, the teacher or worker will tell the child specifically what he/she is doing that is not acceptable and state what the expected behavior is, e.g., “We do not throw the blocks. We use the blocks for building.”
2. If this measure is not effective, the child will be guided to another activity.
3. If inappropriate behavior continues, the child may be placed at a table to work alone away from the other students.
4. If the child’s disruptive behavior continues after these steps have been taken, a teacher will notify the Minister of Children and Youth who will talk with the child and work with the child’s parents.
5. **No physical punishment or verbal abuse, e.g., ridicule, are to be used at any time.** If isolating the child within the classroom or removal of the child from the room becomes necessary, the situation will be discussed with the child’s parents or guardian as soon as possible.

I. Gifts

No staff, either paid or volunteer are to give gifts to individual children or young people without the prior knowledge of the parent(s) or responsible clergy. Because gift giving can be a form of buying loyalty or silence, gift giving should be done on a group basis, or for special occasions only. Gifts may not be elaborate but should be modest and appropriate to the occasion.

J. Training

Prior to working in the youth or children’s department, workers must undergo child protection safety training. Initial training on issues of child sexual abuse in church settings shall be required for all clergy, paid staff and volunteers who regularly supervise youth activities (e.g. youth group leaders) and all other church employees. In addition, a summary of current child abuse statutes and reporting requirements for your legal jurisdiction are to be made available to all clergy, paid staff and volunteers who regularly supervise youth activities, Church Council members and all other church employees.

K. Verification of Reading of Policy Statement

Upon receipt of this policy statement, the volunteer or paid staff person will read and sign the Participation Covenant Statement. (Appendix A)

III. Response by Church Workers to Allegations of Abuse

As caring Christians, we are committed to protect and advocate for children/youth participating in the life of the church. The church is entrusted to provide an emotionally safe, spiritually grounded, healthy environment for children, youth, and adults in which they are protected from abuse. It is our legal and moral responsibility to report suspected abuse whenever it comes to our attention regardless of where that abuse takes place. We shall report suspected abuse to stop potentially existing abuse and to prevent further abuse. To report abuse is to witness to the world of the love and justice of God.

Reporting abuse is a form of ministering to the needs of those crying out for help. If abuse occurs, it is our intention to act as an advocate for all affected persons, providing support, information, assistance and intervention. We seek to provide a supportive atmosphere, offering both objectivity and empathy as we seek to create a climate in which healing can take place.

If abuse is suspected by, observed by or disclosed to a volunteer and/or paid staff member of the church, that person shall report the incident immediately to the pastor. (If the accused is the pastor, see information below.) Be prepared to do the following:

A. Ensure the protection of and tend to the immediate needs of the child, as the situation requires.

B. IMMEDIATELY contact the senior pastor or pastor on call.

C. IMMEDIATELY notify the proper authorities (immediate supervisor, designated church child protection representative or the adult in charge of the event.) This person will:

1. Provide written documentation concerning the incident.
2. Notify the Cleveland County Department of Social Services or the North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services. This is a requirement of the law. (Note: Do not attempt an investigation. This should be left to professionals who are familiar with these cases.)
3. Notify the pastor in charge. If the pastor is the accused party, the designee will notify the chair of the Staff Parish Relations Committee and the District Superintendent.
4. Give written documentation to the pastor and/or Chair of the Staff Parish Relations Committee.

D. The pastor or designee will notify the parents of the victim and take whatever steps are necessary to assure the safety of the child/youth until the parent(s) arrive. It is important to emphasize that the proper authorities must be notified even if the parent(s) do not wish the incident to be reported. (Note: If one or both of the parents is the alleged abuser, contact the proper authorities listed above. Follow their advice about notification of the parents.)

E. After having reported the suspected abuse to the proper authorities, the incident is to be reported immediately to the church's attorney, the church's insurance company, and the district superintendent. The District Superintendent will report the allegation to the bishop's

office. Do not try to handle this without professional assistance. If the accused is a clergy (elder or deacon) member of an annual conference, local pastor, or diaconal minister, provisions of Paragraph 359 and Paragraph 2702 of The 2020/2024 Book of Discipline of The United Methodist Church must be followed.

F. A list of emergency numbers will be available to the staff at all times.

(Appendix A)



Participation Covenant Statement

I acknowledge receipt and orientation of the Aldersgate United Methodist Church (Shelby, NC) Safe Sanctuary Policy. I further acknowledge that I was afforded the opportunity to read the policy in its entirety and ask questions prior to signing this acknowledgement.

Signature: _____ Date: _____

Witness: _____ Date: _____

(Appendix B)

AUTHORIZATION TO OBTAIN CONSUMER REPORT

The following is accurate and complete information required in order for ALDERSGATE UMC to request PeopleFacts to perform a background check on you and in the process obtain a complete consumer report about you:

Full Legal Name : _____
(First Name, Full Middle Name, Last Name)

All Previously Used Former or Other Names: (AKA, Maiden Names, Married Names, Surnames, Etc.) _____

Current Street Address: _____

City: _____ State: _____ Zip: _____

Prior Street Address 1: _____ Dates Resided Here: _____ to _____

City: _____ State: _____ Zip: _____

Current Email Address*: _____ Gender**: M / F Race**: _____

Social Security Number: _____ Date of Birth**: _____

Driver's License Number: _____ Issuing State: _____ Expiration Date: _____

Your signature below indicates the following:

- 1) You authorize, without reservation, PeopleFacts or any third party to obtain and/or furnish to ALDERSGATE UMC any records or information referenced in the provided disclosure statement for volunteer related purposes;
- 2) You authorize ongoing procurement of any records or information, reports and records at any time during your relationship with ALDERSGATE UMC to the extent allowed by law;
- 3) You authorize the use of a fax or photocopy of this authorization as having the same authority as the original;
- 4) You authorize and request, without reservation, any present or former employer, school, police department, financial institution, division of motor vehicles, consumer reporting agency, or other entity, person or agency having knowledge about you to furnish ALDERSGATE UMC and/or PeopleFacts with any and all background information in their possession regarding you for these stated employment purposes;
- 5) You understand and agree that in connection with your volunteer application consumer report information, whether investigative or otherwise, may be shared with and/or reviewed by all applicable parties involved in the hiring process;
- 6) You have read and fully understand the foregoing disclosure and this authorization.
- 7) You certify that all the information you have provided on this form is true, complete, correct and accurate; and
- 8) You certify you have received, reviewed and understand the "Summary of Your Rights under the Fair Credit Reporting Act (15 U.S.C. §1681 et seq.)" which is published by the Federal Trade Commission to help you know your rights.

Customer Signature: _____ Date: _____

**Your email address will be provided to notify you when any adverse public record information is being reported.*

*** This information will be used for background screening and record matching purposes only.*

DISCLOSURE REGARDING CONSUMER REPORTS

ALDERSGATE UMC
1207 W Dixon Blvd Shelby NC 28152
704-487-8491

ALDERSGATE UMC Will Obtain a Background Check

You acknowledge and understand that in connection with your volunteer application with ALDERSGATE UMC (including any independent contract for services) or when deciding whether to modify or continue your ongoing involvement, we may obtain a “consumer report” and/or an “investigative consumer report” on you from PeopleFacts, a consumer reporting agency, or from any third party, in strict compliance with both state and federal law.

Consumer Report Defined

A consumer report is any communication of information by a consumer reporting agency bearing on your credit worthiness, credit standing, credit capacity, character, general reputation, personal characteristics, or mode of living which is used or expected to be used for purposes of serving as a factor in establishing your current and/or continuing eligibility for involvement. A common term for a consumer report is a “background check report.”

Investigative Consumer Report Defined

An investigative consumer report is obtained through personal interviews with individuals who may have knowledge of your character, general reputation, personal characteristics, or mode of living. An investigative consumer report might include, for example, calls to the personal references you provide or conversations with former supervisors or colleagues where you worked.

Reports May Contain

The consumer reports or investigative consumer reports may contain public record information which may be requested or made on you including, but not limited to: consumer credit, criminal records, civil cases in which you have been involved, driving history records, current motor vehicle insurance coverage information, education records, previous employment history, workers compensation claims history, social security traces, military records, professional licensure records, eviction records, drug testing, government records, and others.

You further understand that these reports may include experience information along with reasons for termination of past employment. You also acknowledge and understand that information from various federal, state, local and other agencies which contain information about your past activities will be requested, and that a consumer report containing injury and illness, drug testing, or other medical records and medical information may be obtained only after a tentative offer of employment has been made.

Your Rights as a Consumer

You are hereby notified that you have the right to make a timely request for a copy of the scope and nature of the above investigative background report and/or a complete copy of your consumer report contained in PeopleFacts' files on you at the time of your request by providing proper identification.

You are further notified that, prior to being denied a volunteer position based in whole or in part on information obtained in the consumer report, you will be provided a copy of the report, the name, address and telephone number of the consumer reporting agency and a description in writing of your rights under the Fair Credit Reporting Act. Correspondence to PeopleFacts should be forwarded to:

PeopleFacts | Consumer Relations | 4500 S. 129th East Avenue | Suite 132| Tulsa, OK 74134
1-800-600-8999 | Support@PeopleFacts.com

(Rev. 8/2026)

(Appendix C)
ALDERSGATE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

1207 W. Dixon Blvd, Shelby, NC 28152

Phone: (704) 487-8491

I authorize the staff or designated medical professionals and/or volunteers to administer emergency medical assistance as needed.

MEDICAL AND LIABILITY RELEASE FORM (Revised 2/10/26)

School Grade _____

School _____

Student's Name _____ Date of Birth ____/____/____

Home Phone (____)____-____

Work/cell Phone (____)____-____

Parent(s)/Guardian(s) Student Lives with: _____

Student's Home Address: _____

In case of emergency, notify: _____

Phone (____)____-____

HEALTH HISTORY:

Allergies:

___ Insect stings ___ Drugs (_____) Other allergies (_____)

Other conditions:

___ Heart condition ___ Frequent colds ___ Frequent stomach upsets ___ Hay fever ___

Diabetes

___ Physical handicap ___ Chronic asthma ___ Epilepsy ___ Other
(_____)

If you checked any of the above, please give details (i.e., include normal treatment of allergic reactions):

Name(s) and dosage(s) of any medication(s) that must be taken:

Date of last tetanus shot: ____/____/____ Can this student swim? ___ Yes ___ No

Any swimming restrictions? _____ No _____ Yes

(_____)

Any activity restrictions? ___ No ___ Yes

(_____)

INSURANCE INFORMATION:

Do you have health insurance? ☐ Yes (Please make a copy of your insurance card and attach it to this form.) ☐ No ☐

Name of Insurance Provider: _____

Provider Phone (____)____-____

Policy Number: _____

STATEMENT OF RELEASE:

Every student ministry activity sponsored by this church is carefully planned and supervised by mature adults. However, even with the best of planning and precaution, unforeseen events can occur. By signing this form, the parent or guardian agrees to assume and accept all risks and hazards inherent in church-related activities. He or she agrees not to hold Aldersgate United Methodist Church or its employees or volunteer assistants liable for damages, losses, or injuries to the person named above. He or she also understands that the signature below is for both a medical and liability release.

_____/_____/_____
Parent or guardian's signature Date

STUDENT MINISTRY BEHAVIOR GUIDELINES

- 1) Students are expected to comply with all instructions given by any adult student ministry staff member.
- 2) Students are to respect church facilities and vehicles. Should a student's actions cause damage or breakage, he/she/they and parent(s)/guardian(s) will be held responsible for repair or replacement of the broken or damaged item.
- 3) When attending any church program or event, all students are expected to participate in those activities, not hang around outside the church building, roam the hallways, etc.
- 4) When participating in any church activity, all students are expected to be present for the entirety of the event. Unless special arrangements have been made ahead of time between the student minister and that student's parents, no student is allowed to leave early.
- 5) When we return from an activity, we ask that parents pick up their students at the time stated. We try very hard both to accurately pinpoint our return times and to notify parents from the road on those rare occasions when we do experience major delays; we ask that parents be here to meet us when we arrive, rather than waiting at home for a phone call from their young person.
- 6) Upon our return from any road trip, students are expected to help clean out the interior of the church vehicle(s) before claiming their luggage and going home.
- 7) This should go without saying, but for the record, alcohol, tobacco of any kind, illegal drugs, firearms, knives, foul language, public displays of affection between couples, uncooperative attitudes, intentional exclusion, bad beat-boxing, Karate in Epworth, and/or Designer/Lil Yachty impressions will not be permitted to be a part of any Aldersgate United Methodist Church student function. Keep in mind, most of these things are illegal for the youth to possess in the first place but will also take away from the spiritual nature of our ministry.
- 8) The rule of thumb we're aiming for: ". . . whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks through Him to God the Father" (Colossians 3:17).
- 9) The student ministry staff and volunteers of Aldersgate United Methodist Church reserves the right to dismiss or suspend from any activity any student who demonstrates an attitude of indifference to these guidelines. If the violation occurs during the course of an out-of-town event, dismissal may include sending the student home at the expense of their parent(s)/guardian(s).

We have read these guidelines. We agree to abide by them and understand the consequences of not following them.

_____	____/____/____
Student's signature	Date
_____	____/____/____
Parent's signature	Date

Aldersgate United Methodist Church
1207 W. Dixon Blvd
Shelby, NC, 28152
Phone: 704-487-8491

Church Transportation Permission Form

This form is to be completely filled out and signed by parent or legal guardian before any child or youth under the age of 18 may be transported by church staff or volunteers for any church event. Permission will remain active until revoked by parent or legal guardian.

Please print:

Parent or guardian

name(s) _____

Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Parent 1 Cell Phone _____ Parent 2 Cell Phone

E-mail

address(s) _____

Please list all children of your household who have your permission to be transported by church staff and volunteers for church events. Please note that the church van, rental vehicles, and personal vehicles all may be used for the transportation of groups.

Child's Name

Date of Birth

I hereby give my permission for all the children listed above to ride the van or other vehicles used for church functions. I understand that my children will be under adult supervision. I further understand that in signing this form, I release and hold harmless Aldersgate United Methodist Church and all other church-related functions. By signing this form, I release and hold harmless its trustees, officers, employees, interns, and any volunteers from any liability, past or future, fully and completely.

Parent/Guardian

Signature: _____ Date: _____



1207 W. Dixon Blvd, Shelby, NC 28152 | 704-487-8491

Media Release Form

Please check one of the boxes below:

☐

I DO

☐

I DO NOT

give Aldersgate United Methodist Church permission to publish the likeness or image of myself, and/or my child(ren), in print, electronic, website, or video format (including pictures and videos posted to the Aldersgate United Methodist Church Facebook, Instagram or other media sites).

I release all claims against Aldersgate United Methodist Church with respect to copyright, ownership, and publication, including any claim or compensation related to use of the materials.

Name of Minor(s) (please print)

Adult/Parent/Guardian Name (please print)

Adult/Parent/Guardian Signature

____/____/____
Date

General Guidelines:

It is highly recommended that a release be obtained when photographing or videotaping individuals (especially minors under the age of 18). Parent or Guardian signatures are required; signatures of minors are not sufficient. When images are published, the Church will take cautionary steps to provide minimum identifying information and will not use an individual's full name, specific street or mailing address, email address, or phone number(s).