

LOCAL SAFE GATHERINGS POLICY

This Policy is available at the Connect Center and on the website at www.plattecityumc.com, in the About Us section under Mission & Vision.

The Platte City United Methodist Church (PCUMC) affirms that all children, youth, and vulnerable adults have the right to safe sanctuary. Therefore, we are determined to provide an environment in which these persons are safe from neglect or abuse. **Unless otherwise written in this policy**, the scope and details of this policy and its provisions shall apply to all staff and volunteers, clergy, laity, Scouts BSA, Cub Scouts, Girl Scouts, and other groups who use church property and/or have direct contact with participants in church sponsored events.

The Leadership Council shall be responsible for reviewing and revising this policy annually.

Definitions

- Staff – People employed by PCUMC. All Staff must complete Safe Gatherings certification.
- Adult Volunteer – People 19 years of age or older and must complete Safe Gatherings certification.
- Youth Volunteer – People under 19 years of age and are not Safe Gatherings certified.

Standards for Staff and Volunteers

- Staff and/or Adult Volunteers must also complete Conference Safe Gatherings certification before serving in a UMC district or conference event.
- Staff and all Volunteers shall participate in any and all required training regardless of age.
- **Staff/volunteers must have a copy of valid Driver's License on file in the church office when transporting youth/children to and from church sponsored events. The PCUMC Office Administrator will maintain copies of the driver's licenses in a secure location in the church office. The Church Pastor, Office Administrator, the Director of Children's and Youth Ministry will be the only additional people with access to the licenses. Scouts BSA, Cub Scouts and Girl Scouts are not required to maintain driver's licenses in the church office.**
- It is desired that volunteers be an active participant in the Platte City United Methodist Church for at least six months before serving in an area with youth and children in local church events and continue to be active while serving.
- Youth Volunteers may serve in children's ministry in the local church - in the Nursery and Sunday school - as a secondary person only.
- Youth Volunteers must serve only under the supervision of one or more certified adults who are 22 years of age or older.
- Staff and Adult and Youth Volunteers must be at least four years older than the participants they supervise (no exceptions).

All Staff and Adult Volunteers will review and sign an acknowledgement of this policy on an annual basis.

Procedures for Operating Safely

The following basic safety procedures must be implemented when working with children, youth and vulnerable adults.

- Two Leader Rule: For any small group activities when one leader supervises one group, then two or more groups are to meet within sight and sound of each other. Separate but adjacent rooms with open doors DOES NOT meet this requirement. For each room in which a group is meeting, the “Two Leader Rule” must be met. For example, if classes are meeting in the Pre-K to Second Grade rooms, in addition to, Third to Fifth Grade Sunday school rooms across the hall from each other, two volunteers are required for each class. Volunteers in the Children and/or Youth Ministry programs must never be left alone with a group with no exceptions.
- Leader to Children/Youth Ratio: The minimum ratio of leaders to children will be 1:10. For example, two Safe Gathering-certified personnel or one Safe Gathering-certified Personnel and one noncertified youth volunteer are required for groups of up to 20 children or youth. If the group size increases to 21, three personnel are required to keep the ratio at or lower than 1:10. There will always be at least one Safe Gatherings-certified leader.
- For the church nursery, the minimum ratio will be 1:4. For example, two Safe Gatherings certified personnel or one Safe Gathering-certified Personnel and one noncertified youth volunteer are required for nursery groups of up to eight children. If the group size increases to 9, three personnel are required to keep the ratio at or lower than 1:4. There will always be at least one Safe Gatherings-certified leader. These same ratios apply to diapering and toileting. Parent/Guardian will give appropriate permission, provide supplies and sign a consent form.
- Related Volunteers: Two married or directly related volunteers WILL NOT be the only two people supervising or leading children and youth. If other ratios and requirements are maintained, two directly related volunteers AND a third additional volunteer can supervise or lead children and youth.
- Qualified adults supervising on-site ministry events involving infants, toddlers, pre-school, grade school and high school children/youth will never allow leaders, teachers, volunteers, helpers, facilitators, interns, nor anyone else, to be alone with children or youth at any time . . . no exceptions. Events must be cancelled in the event qualified adult supervision is not available (this would include nursery, all Sunday schools, children and youth events during the week). If such a cancellation would occur, the pastor shall be notified.
- Windows in all classroom doors used by participants will have either an exposed window or half-door.
- Staff and/or Adult volunteers will not have closed door discussions with any child or youth.
- All people interacting with children and/or youth during scheduled events (VBS, LIFT, Youth Group, etc.) must be Safe Gatherings Certified.

- **Overnight Events:**
 - Without exception there will be separate sleeping areas for males and females at all church sponsored events.
 - There will be male and female adult leaders when participants are of more than one gender. Adult leaders must be unrelated or accompanied by additional volunteers.
 - In the event of open showers, separate shower times for participants and for adults shall be designated to prevent participants and adults showering together. Instances may occur where swimsuits will be needed. Adults must be sensitive to privacy issues of participants.
 - All participants must have a completed parental permission and transportation form that is good for a specific time, which will be listed on the form.

- **Sign-In / Sign-Out Procedures.** Children and Youth Ministry Coordinators will maintain an information sheet for each child and youth that contains at a minimum: contact information for parents and legal guardians; a list of adults approved to pick-up and drop-off; health and allergy information; and the ability to opt-out of using children and youth pictures on the church website, social media, or other platform that advertises or highlights church events. Children and Youth Ministry Coordinators will ensure these sheets are available in children and youth classrooms.

- **Communications Between Adults and Children/Youth.** Adult leaders will maintain a three-person rule (two adults and one child/youth) when conducting communications via telephone, email, and social media. Any communications between an adult and child or youth will need to involve a second adult. For example, if an adult leader needs to text or email a child or youth, they must add a second adult to the conversation. If a child or youth emails or texts an adult leader, that adult leader must add a second adult to the conversation when responding. This rule uses the same logic as in-person contact. No leader is allowed to be alone with a child or youth.

Other Organizations Using the Church

PCUMC sponsors several scout groups. All scout leaders will become Safe Gatherings certified, in addition to any Scout mandated training (Youth Protection Training). Scout leaders will review and sign an acknowledgement of this policy on an annual basis.

Outside groups and organizations requesting to use the church facilities will receive a copy of this policy and sign-off on the PCUMC policy each time the building is used for children or youth events. An adult representative of outside groups must sign a waiver of liability for the organization before use of the facilities will be granted.

Reporting of Incidents

If you are reading this document, by law, you are a Mandatory Reporter.

All mandatory reporting is through the Missouri Child Abuse Hotline (800-392-3738) or Elder Abuse and Neglect Hotline (800-392-0210).

All incidents of inappropriate behavior by staff/volunteers or other participants towards a participant calls for immediate onsite corrective action.

Any incident or allegation must be reported immediately!

Contact Pastor Robert Sefrit at 816-813-8184, and the Leadership Council Chair through the church office at 816-858-2441.

Additionally, a participant may confide in you regarding an incident that happened at a time other than at a church sponsored event. You are responsible for reporting all reports of abuse or neglect. Be sure to document the date, time, and all information that the participant has shared with you.

When in doubt, err on the side of caution in order to protect our children and families.