

St. James UMC Safe Sanctuary Policy

God calls us to make our churches safe places, protecting children and other vulnerable persons from abuse. God calls us to create communities of faith where children and adults grow safe and strong. Thus, in the covenant with all United Methodist congregations, we adopt this policy for safe sanctuaries at St. James UMC.

Not only do the scriptures provide numerous examples of how we as Christians should protect our children and our youth, but also the General Conference of The United Methodist Church adopted a resolution in 1996 with the purpose of reducing the risk of abuse in the church. 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.

DEFINITIONS:

EMPLOYEE – anyone who is paid by St. James UMC on a full-time or part-time basis, whether or not they work directly with minors.

VOLUNTEER – anyone who is not paid by St. James UMC on a full-time or part-time basis, and is serving in any position involving the supervision or custody of minors. Examples: Nursery, childcare, preschool, grade school, middle school, high school, and college workers, bus drivers, teachers, chaperones, others as designated by ministry area directors.

MINISTRY LEADER/COORDINATOR—any person who is responsible for children or youth ministries.

SEXUAL ABUSE: any touching of the sexual or other intimate parts of a child or any other conduct or action done for the purpose of gratifying the sexual desire of either party either (1) through physical force that overcomes earnest resistance or a threat, express or implied, that places a child in fear of immediate death or serious physical injury to himself or another person, or (2) by a person 18 years old or older against another who is less than 16 years old, or by a person FOUR or more years older than the victim (§ 13A-6-60, § 13A-6-66, Ala. Code 1975).

MINOR: any individual under the age of 18 years (§ 26-16-2, Ala. Code 1975) **or 18 years old but still in high school.**

VULNERABLE ADULT: Any person 18 years of age or older whose behavior indicates that he or she is mentally incapable of adequately caring for himself or herself and his or her interests without serious consequences to himself or herself or others, or who, because of physical or mental impairment, is unable to protect himself or herself from abuse, neglect, exploitation, sexual abuse, or emotional abuse by others, and who has no guardian, relative or other appropriate person who is able, willing and available to assume the kind and degree of protection and supervision required under the circumstances (§ 38-9-2(1), Ala. Code 1975).

POLICIES AND PROCEDURES:

The policies and procedures set forth below will apply to all people who give supervision or have custody of minors or who have opportunity to have contact with minors in St. James UMC facilities or sponsored activities whether clergy, staff, or volunteer. This document will address four (4) areas that are critical for the protection of the children, our employees, and St. James UMC. Those areas are selection process, protection policy, reporting procedures, and response procedures.

I. SELECTION PROCESS:

Employees

- All employees will be provided with a Job description.
- All employees must complete a confidential application form with 3 reference checks including former employees.
- All employees must complete a background check consent form and receive appropriate clearances of all checks to work with minors. (See Appendix A)
- All potential employees will undergo a personal interview.
- All employees will attend safe sanctuary training every three years.
- All employees will renew background checks every three years.

Volunteers

- All volunteers will complete a confidential application form.
- All volunteers must provide written permission to run a background check.
- All volunteers must attend safe sanctuary training and update that training every three years.
- All volunteers must receive appropriate clearances on all checks to work with minors.
- All volunteers will renew background checks every three years.

All records, forms, and reports on volunteers and employees will become a part of a confidential personnel file kept in a locked file cabinet.

A background check will be performed for all employees and volunteers who work with, teach, counsel, or chaperone children or vulnerable adults at any St. James UMC function whether on campus or at an alternate location. Said background checks must be renewed every three years. All adults without background checks may serve in a non-contact capacity under supervision of those approved.

SIX MONTH POLICY

In addition to the above requirements, a volunteer must be a member or regular attendee of St. James UMC for at least six (6) months prior to having direct contact with minors or vulnerable adults.

SAFE SANCTUARY TRAINING will be conducted annually and will include:

- Copies of St. James UMC's Safe Sanctuary policy
- Policies to be implemented
- Procedures for ministry
- Steps for reporting procedures
- Details of AL state law

II. PROTECTION POLICY:

TWO ADULT RULE: Two non-related adults will always be present in groups of minors or vulnerable adults except in emergency situations and where not reasonably feasible.

ALL PERSONS will BE AT LEAST FIVE YEARS OLDER than the age group they lead or supervise.

RATIOS OF ADULT/CHILD:

1:3 for ages birth to 36 months

1:7 for ages 3 to 5 years

1:8-9 for kindergarten – grade 5

1:10 for grades 6-12

COUNSELING:

Any one-to-one mentoring or counseling session shall be conducted in a room with windows or open doors so as to remain in sight of another leader.

WINDOWS/ DOORS:

The preschoolers, children and youth will be placed in rooms with windows (in doors or walls), half doors, or open doors for all teaching/learning activities. A "floater" or hall monitor may also be used to make frequent room and restroom checks.

TRANSPORTATION:

All drivers of church-owned vehicles must have a copy of his or her license and proof of insurance on file in the church office.

Each parent must sign a permission/liability/emergency information form. Consent forms may be completed for a one-year period and should be renewed annually. All consent forms will be considered valid **for one year unless** renewed. (See Appendix D)

- The two-adult rule will apply to all vehicles unless a bevy of cars are traveling together. In that case, all vehicles will remain with the caravan at all times.
- Everyone should wear seat belts.
- No one under 85 pounds or under 14 years old should sit in the front seat.
- St. James UMC will only charter buses whose driver's background checks are up-to-date.

YOUTH should not be permitted to DRIVE FROM THE CHURCH TO OFF-SITE LOCATION. They should either plan to meet at location or be transported by adult drivers. Youth should not transport other youth (excluding siblings) without prior written parental consent from both parties (driver's guardians and passenger's guardians).

OVERNIGHT/ OFF-SITE ACTIVITIES:

Overnight events may include, but are not limited to, summer camps, retreats, mission trips, lock-ins, etc. Off-site trips may include, but are not limited to, after glows, "See/Saw you at the Pole events," etc.

In a hotel setting, no adults will share a bed with a minor other than their own child. If possible, we will choose hotels with rooms opening to inside hallway. In a bunkroom setting, at least 2 same gender adults will sleep in a large room with multiple bunk beds. AT NO TIME should a chaperone be alone in a room with just one child.

Overnight and Off-site trips will include information exchange:

1. Each parent must receive written contact info to include:
 - a. Start/stop times
 - b. Location of event
 - c. Program content
 - d. Lodging information
2. Staff/volunteers/drivers must receive:
 - a. All contact information for parents
 - b. Signed parent/guardian permission/liability form
 - c. Health/emergency information

III. REPORTING PROCEDURES (See Appendix B)

Alabama State law encourages voluntary reporting of child abuse in faith-based ministry settings. In keeping with Christian beliefs that children should not be abused or neglected, St James UMC will practice and advocate voluntary compliance with the Alabama State law suggesting reporting of suspected abuse/neglect of children and vulnerable adults.

1. Allegations of suspected abuse/neglect should be reported to the appropriate ministry coordinator, who will then follow the staff reporting procedures.
2. If a staff member of St. James UMC is accused of abuse, the Safe Sanctuary Coordinator should directly report the incident to the SPRC Chairperson.

IV. RESPONSE PROCEDURES

* DO NOT speak with media representatives; instead, refer them to the senior pastor.

1. A quick, compassionate and unified response to alleged incident of child abuse will be made.

2. All allegations will be taken seriously, with grace shown to ALL parties.
3. The Pastor will yield to the District Superintendent and church personnel are not to undertake an investigation of the incident. However, in all cases of reported or observed abuse in a children's/youth's activity, all those present should be at the service of official investigation agencies.
4. The Church staff will not deny, minimize, or blame any individuals involved in the allegations. The church will minister to all involved and cooperate with authorities.

Appendix A
Safe Sanctuary Background Check
Negative Occurrence Example Letters

Rejection of Application to Work with Children and/or Youth

Date

Dear _____:

With your permission, the St. James UMC received a criminal background check from Employment Screening Services based on the personal information you provided. There was an indication that you have a criminal conviction. After reviewing the information, we have decided to refuse you the privilege of working with the church or conference-affiliated program for which you applied. Please note that we are willing to meet with you and discuss this negative occurrence if you wish to appeal our decision. However, until such a time as we feel confident that this negative occurrence will not compromise your suitability to work with children and/or youth, you are not permitted to serve in any leadership position with children and/or youth in the North Alabama Conference of the United Methodist Church. We welcome you as a member of the church and want you to be a part of our community in other capacities, but we feel it best not to have you serve with the children or youth.

Sincerely,

Letter of Acceptance with Stipulations

Date

Dear _____:

With your permission, the St. James UMC received a criminal background check from Employment Screening Services based on the personal information you provided. There was an indication that you have a criminal conviction. Based on this information, we have decided to limit your participation with the church or conference-affiliated programs for which you applied. Please note that we are willing to meet with you and discuss this negative occurrence if you wish to appeal our decision. However, until such a time as we feel confident that this negative occurrence will not compromise your suitability to work with children and/or youth without restrictions, you must meet the following stipulation(s).

List of stipulations or restrictions:

Thank you for your cooperation in this matter. Any failure to comply with these terms will mean the immediate termination of your privileges of working with children and/or youth in the North Alabama Annual Conference.

Sincerely,

Letter of Acceptance without Stipulations

Date

Dear _____:

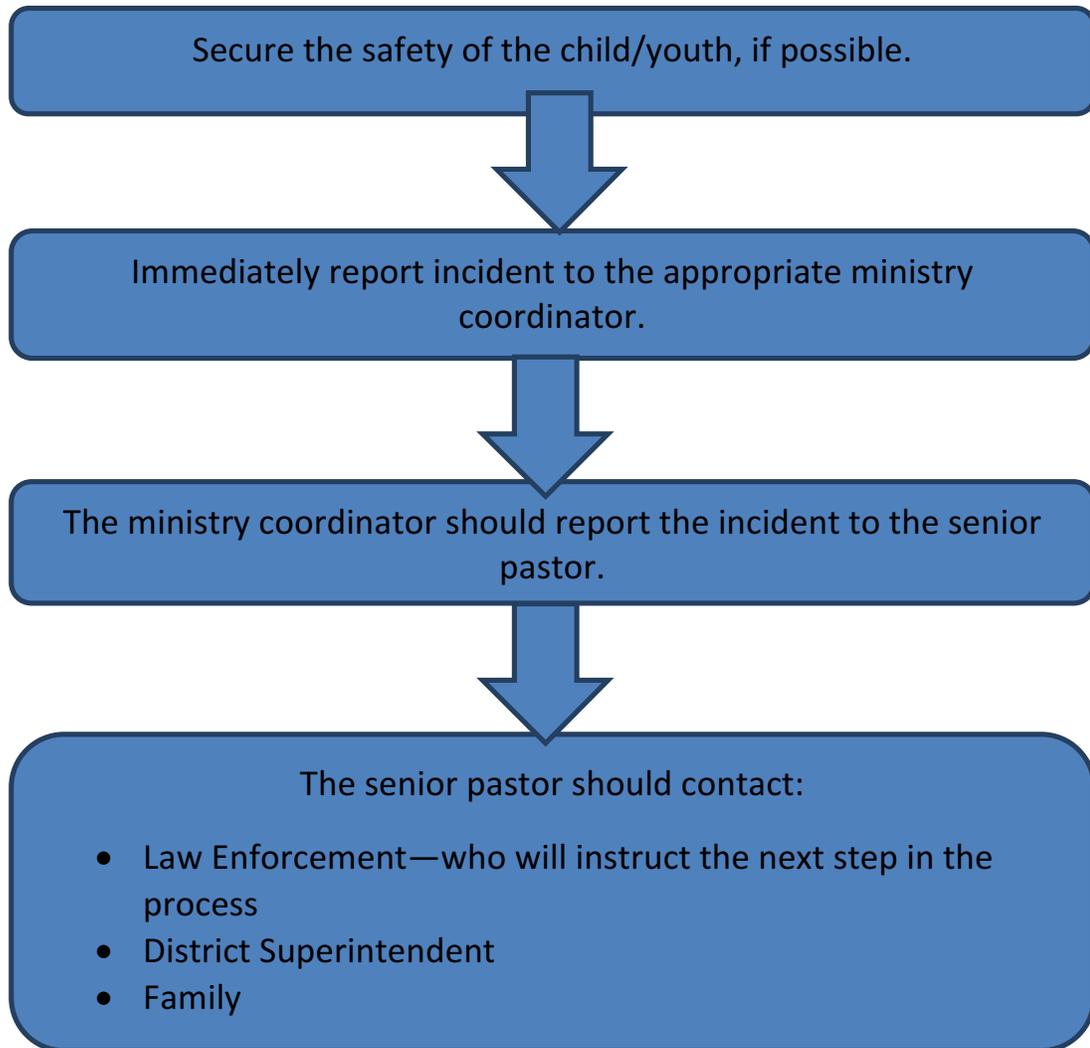
With your permission, the St. James UMC received a criminal background check from the Employment Screening Services based on the personal information you provided. There was an indication that you have a criminal conviction. Based on our review of the information we received, we have decided to approve your participation with the church or conference-affiliated program for which you applied. Please note that we are aware that people make mistakes and we support the progress you have made since that incident. However, having made a mistake with legal consequences, it is imperative that you present yourself for service in the Church and North Alabama Conference with an even greater sense of responsibility for maintaining the highest ideals of the Christian lifestyle. We are confident you can do just that. Thank you for your willingness to serve.

Sincerely,

Appendix B
Safe Sanctuary Reporting Incident Guidelines

* DO NOT speak with media representatives; instead, refer them to the senior pastor.

Procedure



The state of Alabama protects reporters of child abuse from litigation. Reporting an allegation or incident in good faith is what is mandated by law. We are NOT responsible for determining the validity of the allegation.

Document in writing all actions in the handling of the incident:

- Date
- Name/Signature/Title of person reporting incident
- Each person contacted (name/title/date)
- Statements
- Action taken

Appendix C Safe Sanctuary and Technology

Youth and children have great affinities and knowledge of the newest technology and how to use it! As adults responsible for their well-being, we must be knowledgeable about technology to protect our children.

A few web sites that provide helpful information:

[FBI Guidelines to Internet Safety](#)

[Safe Eyes Software](#)

[Pew Research Center—Social Networking Information](#)

Social Networking Sites

These are sites where youth and adults use the internet to connect to people they know. They are able to "friend" people on these sites and read status updates regarding the daily lives of those friends. Users are able to post pictures, join or create groups that solicit support, and update their own status so others may know what is happening in their lives. Younger users should be taught about the dangers of posting too much personal information on a profile page, providing too much contact information, and accepting or sending friend requests of someone not known personally.

Some popular social networking sites include, but are not limited to, the following:

Twitter

Facebook

SnapChat

Pinterest

Instagram

Vine

Vimeo

YouTube

Cyberstalking / Cyberbullying

Teach children and youth to use the internet and social networks as a form of communication—not a place to bully or pick on others. You may feel safe because you are sitting behind your computer sharing confidential information or saying something that could hurt someone else. Words can be extremely hurtful, and we should teach our children and youth to be responsible for what they say online that could harm themselves or others.

Photos

It is not recommended to post photos of the children or youth members without parents' permission. Youth and children should not post pictures from conference events on their social networking sites. A good idea is to have one person responsible for taking photos, then make and distribute CDs for youth group event attendees. Youth and children could possibly manipulate pictures they make in a harmful manner, so responsible adult awareness and supervision is crucial.

Communication with Children and Youth

Get prior permission from parents to communicate with children or youth by E-mail, cell phone, instant message, or text. If you E-mail your youth, make sure to blind carbon copy. Send messages at appropriate times—youth or children in school shouldn't be distracted by reading your text messages.

Safety Tips for Children and Youth

1. Online communication with people not personally known should never take place.
2. Never give out personal information or identification.
3. Stick to web sites you personally know.
4. Tell an adult if someone online makes you uncomfortable or asks to meet you in person.
5. Never share your passwords except with your parents.
6. Never agree to meet personally with someone you only know from online communication.
7. Only accept friends that you know personally on social networking sites.
8. Don't respond to technology contact from strangers.
9. Stay out of online chat rooms.
10. Alter pictures of yourself so that school uniform, church logo, or any other any identifying information is not visible before posting.

Adapted from Joy Thornburg Melton's Book "Safe Sanctuaries" p. 81-82

Appendix D
Safe Sanctuary Forms

St. James United Methodist Church
SAFE SANCTUARY VOLUNTEER APPLICATION

Name (First, middle, maiden, last):

Address: (Mailing and physical if different)

City:

State:

Zip:

Daytime phone: _____ Cell Phone: _____

Evening phone: _____ Other phone: _____

E-mail address: _____

Social Media Preference: _____

Occupation: _____

Employer: _____

Current job responsibilities and schedule: _____

Previous work experience: _____

Previous volunteer experience: _____

Special interests, hobbies, and skills: _____

How many hours per week are you available to volunteer? _____

Are you available: Days? _____ Evenings? _____ Weekends? _____

Can you make a one-year commitment to this volunteer role? _____

Why would you like to volunteer with children and/or youth? _____

What skills/qualifications do you have that would help you work with children and/or youth?

Would you be available for periodic volunteer training sessions? _____ No _____ Yes

Signature of applicant: _____ Date: _____

St. James United Methodist Church
SAFE SANCTUARY EMPLOYMENT APPLICATION

Name (first, Middle, maiden, last):

Present address:

City, State, Zip code:

Are you over the age of 18? _____ Yes _____ No

Primary phone: _____ Secondary phone: _____

E-mail address: _____

Position applied for: _____

Date you are available to start: _____

Qualifications:

Academic achievements: (Schools attended, degrees earned, dates of completion)

Continuing education completed: (Courses taken, dates of completion)

Professional organizations: (list any in which you have membership)

Do you have first aid training? Yes No Date completed: _____

Do you have CPR training? Yes No Date completed: _____

Previous work experience: Please list your previous employers from the past five years. Include the job title, a description of position duties and responsibilities, the name of the company/employer, the address of company/employer, the name of your immediate supervisor, and the dates you were employed in each position.

Previous volunteer experience: Please list any relevant volunteer positions you have held and list the duties you performed in each position, the name of your supervisor, the address and phone number of the volunteer organization, and the dates of your volunteer service.

Have you ever been charged, convicted of, or pled guilty to a crime, either a misdemeanor or a felony (including but not limited to drug-related charges, child abuse, and other crimes of violence, theft, or motor vehicle violations)? No Yes

Have you ever been exposed to an incident of child abuse or neglect? ___ No ___ Yes

If yes, how did you feel about the incident? _____

Would you be available for periodic training sessions? ___ No ___ Yes

References: Please list three personal references (people who are not related to you by blood or marriage) and provide complete contact information for each. *References are confidential.*

1. Name: _____

Address: _____

Daytime phone: _____ Evening phone: _____

Relationship to reference: _____

2. Name: _____

Address: _____

Daytime phone: _____ Evening phone: _____

Relationship to reference: _____

3. Name: _____

Address: _____

Daytime phone: _____ Evening phone: _____

Relationship to reference: _____

Waiver and Consent:

I, _____, hereby certify that the information I have provided on this application for employment is true and correct. I authorize St. James UMC to verify the information I have provided on this application by contacting the references and employers I have listed, by conducting a criminal records check, or by other means, including contacting others whom I have not listed. I authorize the references and employers listed in this application to give you whatever information they may have regarding my character and fitness for the job for which I have applied. Furthermore, I waive any rights I may have to confidentiality.

In the event that my application is accepted and I become employed by St. James United Methodist Church, I agree to abide by the policies of the organization and to refrain from inappropriate conduct in the performance of my duties.

I have read this waiver and the entire application, and I am fully aware of its contents. I sign this consent freely and under no duress or coercion.

A photo release paragraph should be added to this waiver as well.

Signature of applicant: _____ Date: _____

St. James United Methodist Church
SAFE SANCTUARIES CHARACTER REFERENCE

Applicant name: _____

Reference name: _____

Reference address: _____

Reference phone(s): _____

1. What is your relationship to the applicant?

2. How long have you known the applicant?

3. How well do you know the applicant?

4. How would you describe the applicant?

5. How would you describe the applicant's ability to relate to children and/or youth?

6. How would you describe the applicant's ability to relate to adults?

7. How would you describe the applicant's leadership abilities?

8. How would you feel about having the applicant as a worker with your child and/or youth?

9. Do you know of any characteristics that would negatively affect the applicant's ability to work with children and/or youth? If so, please describe.

10. Do you have any knowledge that the applicant has ever been convicted of a crime? If so, please describe.

11. Please list any other comments you would like to make about this applicant:

Reference inquiry completed by: _____ *Date:* _____

St. James United Methodist Church

SAFE SANCTUARY AUTHORIZATION AND REQUEST TO RUN BACKGROUND CHECK

I, the undersigned, do hereby authorize St. James UMC to request the release of information regarding any record of criminal charges or convictions maintained on me, whether said file is a local, state, or national file and including but not limited to accusations and convictions for crimes committed against minors, to the fullest extent permitted by state and federal law. I do release the information holder from all liability that may result from any such disclosure made in response to this request.

Signature of applicant: _____ Date: _____

Print your name neatly (first, middle, maiden, last):

Print your email address neatly:

St. James United Methodist Church

SAFE SANCTUARY PROOF OF BACKGROUND CHECK AFFIDAVIT

St. James United Methodist Church has performed a national background check

by _____
(Name of Company performing the background check)

on _____
(Name of volunteer)

The background check, dated _____ is on file at the church office in Florence,
AL. The background check was _____. The custodian of
(Clear or Not clear)

the background check is the Safe Sanctuary Coordinator of St. James United Methodist Church.

I hereby certify the information above to be accurate and complete.

Custodian of records (print name)

Custodian of records (sign name)

date

Witness

date

St. James United Methodist Church

SAFE SANCTUARY NOTICE OF UNFAVORABLE BACKGROUND CHECK

Date: _____

Applicant's name: _____

As you authorized in your employment/volunteer application, St. James United Methodist Church has recently completed a background check as part of our application process. The purpose of this letter is to inform you that there is information in the report we received that, if accurate, would prevent us from offering you employment, or allowing you to volunteer, at this time. A copy of this report is enclosed.

If, after reviewing the report, (1) you believe that the information contained is inaccurate, and/or (2) you want to know what information in the report falls outside of the acceptable guidelines, we ask that you contact us as soon as possible. The contact information is included below. Otherwise, we will assume that you no longer wish to pursue employment/volunteerism with us.

This report was furnished to us by _____. Please understand that while they provided the report, they did not make the decision, and they are unable to provide you the specific reasons why our church made this decision. Under the law, you have the right to dispute directly with screening company any information in this report.

St. James United Methodist Church

610 Cox Creek Parkway

Florence, AL 35630

256-764-1692

SAFE SANCTUARY
SCREENING INTERVIEW

The following are some suggested questions which may be used in an interview with a potential employee or volunteer:

1. Why are you interest in being associated with our organization?
2. How would you describe yourself?
3. When you read the job description, what appealed to you the most?
4. What specific skills do you bring to this job?
5. With what age group and gender do you prefer to work? Why? Please provide examples of your work with this age group.
6. If you are trained, are you willing to work with other age groups or genders?
7. What kinds of programs or activities would you be willing to lead, supervise, or conduct? If trained, would you be willing to conduct other activities?
8. What do you feel are the chief indicators of a successful program or activity?
9. Give a specific example of how you overcame a difficulty in a job, school, or family.
10. Give an example of how you overcame a problem with a young person other than your own?
11. How were you disciplined as a child? How would/do you discipline now?

12. In what types of activities or recreation do you participate?

13. What were your favorite subjects in school?

14. What would you like to tell us that has not been covered?

15. What questions do you have about our organization or this position?

SAFE SANCTUARY

PARTICIPATION COVENANT

This congregation is committed to providing a safe and secure environment for all children, youth, at-risk adults, and volunteers who participate in ministries and activities sponsored by the church. The following policy statements reflect our congregation's commitment to preserving this church as a holy place of safety and protection for all who would enter and as a place in which all people can experience the love of God through relationships with others.

- Adults who have been convicted of child abuse of any kind are not allowed to volunteer to work with children or youth in any church-sponsored activity.
- Adult survivors of child abuse need the love and support of our congregation. Any adult survivor who desires to volunteer in some capacity to work with children or youth is encouraged to discuss his or her willingness with one of the church's ministers before accepting an assignment.
- All adult volunteers involved with children or youth of our church must have been members of the congregation for at least six months before beginning a volunteer assignment.
- Adult volunteers with children and youth shall observe the "Two-Adult Rule" at all times so that no adult is ever alone with children or youth.
- Adult volunteers with children and youth shall attend regular training and educational events provided by the church to keep volunteers informed of church policies and state laws regarding child abuse.
- Adult volunteers shall immediately report to their supervisor any behavior that seems abusive or inappropriate.

Please mark each of the statements to which you will commit:

_____ 1. As a volunteer in this congregation, I agree to observe and abide by all church policies regarding working in ministries with children and youth.

_____ 2. As a volunteer in this congregation, I agree to observe the "Two-Adult Rule" at all times.

_____ 3. As a volunteer in this congregation, I agree to participate in training and education events provided by the church related to my volunteer assignment.

_____ 4. As a volunteer in this congregation, I agree to promptly report abusive or inappropriate behavior to my supervisor.

~~_____ 5. As a volunteer in this congregation, I agree to discuss with a minister of this congregation my experience, if any, as a survivor of child abuse.~~

_____ 5. As a volunteer in this congregation, I agree to inform a minister of this congregation if I have ever been convicted of child abuse.

After reading this participation covenant, I agree to abide by the policies set forth above.

Signature of Applicant

Date

Digital Communication

Release Form

2016-2017



St. James UMC

Child's/Youth's Name(s) _____

On occasion an adult leader may, with your permission, wish to contact your child through the use of digital communication. This communication may take the form of emails, text messaging, social media and other forms of digital communication. I am aware that all adult leaders at St. James UMC must comply with our Safe Sanctuary policy. Compliance with this policy includes a criminal background check and training in appropriate digital communication with minors. I am also aware that the Safe Sanctuary policy includes procedures to report any inappropriate communication with your child. I also realize that I have the right to revoke my permission at any time and for any reason.

(Initial one option)

_____ **YES**, I grant permission for adult leaders from St. James UMC or related ministry organizations to contact my child via digital communication including but not limited to Email, Cell Phone calls, Text Messaging and Social Media.

_____ **NO**, I prefer my child to have no digital contact with the adult leaders from St. James UMC or related ministry organizations.

Parent/Guardian Signature

Date