



October 4, 2019

Dear Missouri Conference Pastors and Local Church Associates,

The Missouri Conference prides itself on taking a leadership position in creating a safe environment for children, youth and vulnerable adults. As part of that commitment, beginning January 1, 2020 we are transitioning our online abuse prevention program from Safe Sanctuaries to Safe Gatherings.

We believe Safe Gatherings is an improvement to our current procedure. It is like Safe Sanctuaries in that it is an abuse prevention system that incorporates an online application, abuse prevention training, background checks and reference checks for staff and volunteers to help prevent abuse of children, youth and vulnerable adults in group settings. However, we believe their product to be more relevant, technologically progressive and user friendly.

Safe Gatherings process includes processing of two electronic references, background checks and a 1.5-hour online abuse prevention and boundary awareness training. There will continue to be two levels of certification – Conference and Local Church Certification. An applicant can be certified at either level or both levels.

We believe the transition will be smooth for local churches. We plan to honor all existing Safe Sanctuaries certifications through their individual certification period. Any staff or volunteer whose certification expires after December 31, 2019 will have their certification run through Safe Gatherings. After December 31, 2019, your applicants will not have access to the Safe Sanctuaries training module. The pastor and LCA will still have access to MissionConnect's Protect module in order to track applicants whose certifications are still valid within Safe Sanctuaries.

In addition to the transition, there are a few more changes to the certification process that we believe will help us better protect the most vulnerable in our communities.

- Local Church Associates (LCAs) will be referred to as Safe Gatherings Administrators (SGA). Pastors will be the primary contact for concerns related to church staff and volunteer files. SGAs will be able to access the real-time progress of applicants and be able to download and sort applicants.
- We are moving from a four-year certification period to a three-year period.
- We are expanding the background check to the maximum search ability to include a national and multi-county of residence 7-year background check, national and state of residence Sex Offender Registry check.
- The price per applicant for the individual church program available through the Safe Gatherings website will be \$22.50. *(Note: For the next year, the cost for Safe Gatherings certification is \$45 per applicants and currently the Conference is covering \$22.50 of the \$45 cost.)*



- For individual church accounts, there is also an option to complete a driving record if the individual will be driving as part of their ministry. That cost is \$8.50 for Missouri licenses.

Local churches can begin the transition to Safe Gatherings sooner than January 1 if they choose. Simply, contact the Safe Gatherings team at contact@SafeGatherings.com or 888-241-8258 to provide the contact information for your church or group. As soon as the church or group is set up within Safe Gatherings, your applicant pool will be eligible to begin the process of certification. The Safe Gatherings team is ready to assist you with setup.

This change will have minimal effect on your existing written protection policies. You may want to include the phrase Safe Sanctuaries/Safe Gatherings until you have transitioned your entire applicant pool to Safe Gatherings. At that time, you can remove all references to Safe Sanctuaries.

The Missouri Conference is committed to ensuring that we provide safe places of worship and fellowship to everyone we serve. We believe Safe Gatherings is just one tool to help us do that. Your cooperation and leadership are essential in this transition. Please contact Tina Twenter, Safe Sanctuaries Administrator, if you have any questions in the meantime.

In Christ,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Kim Jenne". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Rev. Kim Jenne
Director of Connectional Ministries

Enc. Safe Gatherings Transition FAQs



SAFE GATHERINGS TRANSITION FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

How long is Safe Sanctuaries available as our online abuse prevention program?

After December 31, 2019, each church will receive a message alert from MissionConnect that informs the LCA that they will not be able to initiate a new certification but will need to direct their applicant to go to Safe Gatherings for a certification course.

How do we initiate an individual church account with Safe Gatherings?

The pastor or LCA (now called Safe Gatherings Administrator or SGA) will contact the Safe Gatherings team at contact@SafeGatherings.com or 888-241-8258 to provide the contact information for your church or group.

How will applicants be contacted for certification?

As soon as the church or group is set up within Safe Gatherings, you will direct your staff or volunteer applicants to follow the links below to begin their Safe Gatherings approval.

Click [here](#) to start the Safe Gatherings process.

Click [here](#) to login to your Safe Gatherings application *after* you have completed your registration.

When applicants follow the link to get started, they will need to select:

- Language Preference (English or Spanish),
- Type of Organization (Church or Faith Based Organization)
- Denomination (Methodist)
- State where church is located

In the next field, they will start typing any part of your organization name, ex: "Good Shepherd", and a list will appear in a dropdown menu where they will select the organization name where they are seeking approval to serve.

Individuals can login to their account at any time to check the status of their application.

What applicant type should I consider myself in Safe Gatherings?

We have updated applicant types to better suit Missouri Conference-specific needs. Please see the below applicant type descriptions. If you have questions regarding what applicant type you or someone within your local church should apply for, please contact your district office administrator or Tina Twenter, Safe Sanctuaries Administrator at ttwenter@moumethodist.org.

- **Certified Candidate:** Lay person certified by a district Board of Ordained Ministry (dCOM) currently pursuing licensing or ordination.
- **Church Staff:** Non-clergy, paid members of local church staff including lay pulpit supply (SY) or Certified Lay Ministers (CLMs) or clergy from other denominations or Conferences not under appointment by the Missouri Conference Bishop or Cabinet and serving on local church staff.



- **Volunteer:** Non-clergy volunteers serving in children, youth and/or vulnerable adult ministries. Licensed local pastors who have not completed Course of Study and are not under appointment should apply as “Church Staff” if serving on local church staff or “Volunteer” if they are not serving on local church staff.
- **Camp Counselor:** Paid or unpaid laity serving in camping ministries including Camp Director. Clergy serving as Camp Directors or Counselors should always be marked “Clergy” in applicant type.
- **Clergy:** Licensed, provisional and ordained elders and deacons including retirees still serving or volunteering. Clergy from other denominations or Conferences not under appointment by the Missouri Conference Bishop or Cabinet should apply as “Volunteers.” Clergy from other denominations or Conferences not under appointment by the Missouri Conference Bishop or Cabinet and serving on local church staff should apply as “Church Staff.” Licensed local pastors who have retired and have completed Course of Study and require certification should apply as “Clergy.”

What is the cost of Safe Gatherings certification?

The price per applicant for the individual church program available through the Safe Gatherings website will be \$22.50. (*Note: For the next year, the cost for Safe Gatherings certification is \$45 per applicants and currently the Conference is covering \$22.50 of the \$45 cost.*) For individual church accounts, there is also an option to complete a driving record if the individual will be driving as part of their ministry. That cost is \$8.50 for Missouri licenses.

How will clergy be certified?

Since clergy are not members of local churches, they will remain in the Conference Enterprise account with Safe Gatherings. The Conference will continue to monitor clergy renewal dates and when it is time for renewal, will notify them to initiate the Safe Gatherings process.

Can our pastor be included our individual church account?

No, clergy (licensed and ordained pastors) are maintained within the Conference Enterprise account and should not be linked to an individual church account.

How can I learn more about the Safe Gatherings process?

Visit <https://safegatherings.com> to learn more about the program and process.

What if my applicants’ certifications don’t expire for another three years?

If you have applicants that have recently been certified in Safe Sanctuaries, there is a chance that their renewal may not come up for another three or four years. Missouri will honor Safe Sanctuaries certifications until they expire. Upon expiring, the applicant will need to seek certification through Safe Gatherings. Once their Safe Sanctuaries certification expires, the LCA/SGA will have to send the staff or volunteer applicant the link to begin certification with Safe Gatherings. See above FAQ on “How will applicants be contacted for certification?”



Does this mean I have to monitor my staff and volunteers under two systems – Safe Sanctuaries and Safe Gatherings?

The short answer is Yes. However, it is up to the local church. While the Missouri Conference will honor Safe Sanctuaries certifications until their expiration date, any local church can make the move to Safe Gatherings all at once. This means that you would require all staff and volunteers to recertify themselves through Safe Gatherings regardless of when their Safe Sanctuaries certification expires. The cost to those individual applicants is outlined in the FAQ above about the cost of Safe Gatherings certification. The local church will still be able to pay for the applicant's portion of the fee. This will be determined at the time of individual church set up with Safe Gatherings.

How will we be notified if there is a problem with someone's certification?

Applications with concerns are addressed with the local church pastor. Safe Gatherings will contact the pastor of the local church with any concerns related to an applicant's background screen, reference checks or their ability to complete the training module. Safe Gatherings will provide certificates for approved applicants and will stay in touch with applicants through the renewal process.

What should we do with our branch accounts at First Advantage?

As the transition occurs, local churches may wish to close their branch accounts with First Advantage as you move more and more volunteers to the Safe Gatherings process. That decision is up to the local church. The Conference will be phasing out of our enterprise account with First Advantage over four years during this transition.

What if I have more questions?

Contact Safe Gatherings at (888) 241-8258 or at <https://safegatherings.com/contact> with questions about the program. You can also reach out to Missouri Conference Safe Sanctuaries Administrator, Tina Twenter at ttwenter@moumethodist.org or (573) 441-1770 for questions about the transition. Tina will continue to provide administrative support to the program from the Missouri Conference.

Are there any other advantages to Safe Gatherings?

Safe Gatherings has a sister organization with CongregationU that provides more than 40 online courses on practical topics relevant to your church or faith-based organization. Topics include human resources, security and safety, risk management, health and wellness, and more. Several courses are also available in Spanish.

Rooftop pricing enables your church or organization to cost-effectively train everyone in your congregation, including leaders, volunteers and members. Pricing is based on average weekly attendance. This option provides unlimited uses of each of the courses included in the rooftop package. You will also receive a 20% discount on the purchase of this package. Contact the CongregationU team at contact@congregationu.com or (866) 862-5855 for additional information or with questions.