

The following is the development guide for local churches to create and uphold a Safe Sanctuaries Policy within their communities.

The below template is a guide for each local community to use to develop their own Safe Sanctuaries policy that is unique to their own ministry contexts. In addition to the below template, we also offer these resources to help local communities formulate their Safe Sanctuaries policies. For assistance in creating a Safe Sanctuaries policy, and to have your policy certified, please reach out to GNJ's Safe Sanctuary Coordinator.

1. Standards for All Safe Sanctuaries Policies in GNJ (link here the checklist for approval)
2. If your community has programming that includes [Online Ministry](#) for children, youth or vulnerable adults, please refer to this resource from UM Discipleship Ministries.
3. For [Small Churches](#), please visit this resource for assistance from UM Discipleship Ministries.
4. For [Large Churches](#), please visit this resource for assistance from UM Discipleship Ministries.
5. For Local Churches engaging in hospitality and inclusion of [LGBTQIA+](#) children, youth or vulnerable adults, please visit this resource from UM Discipleship Ministries.
6. For even more resourcing on Safe Sanctuaries, please check out the [Safe Sanctuaries Library](#) from UM Discipleship Ministries.
7. Each local church will develop its own Volunteer Application and Incident Reporting Form for internal use. There are examples of these on the Safe Sanctuaries website and must be approved by the Safe Sanctuaries Coordinator.

It is important to work with a team in the local church to contextualize each congregation's Safe Sanctuaries Policy- while there are standards required for each church (as noted above in link 1), every local church has their own set of ministry needs and programming. It is important to be intentional about the work that Safe Sanctuaries require as we live into our mission to protect and build the kingdom of God.

### **United Methodists of Greater New Jersey Safe Sanctuary Policy Development Guide**

**Safe Sanctuary Policy Development Guide Note:** This sample is for general guideline use only; some sections may or may not apply to your local church setting. Your church policy should be written to address your local church and community safety issues. You are to use this document as a foundation for writing the policy for your local church and the ministry contexts you have.

**Importance of Policy & Mandate for the Church:** God has called us to make our ministries safe and to protect our children, youth, and other vulnerable people from abuse and exploitation. God has also called us to create communities of faith where children, youth, and other vulnerable people can be safe and grow strong. Jesus taught that “Whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me” (Mark 9:37 NRSV) and “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 NRSV).

The Social Principles of The United Methodist Church state, “...children must be protected from economic, physical, and sexual exploitation and abuse” and “we affirm that all persons are individuals of sacred worth, created in the image of God” (§161, “Social Principles”). At each child’s baptism, we affirm our responsibility to their safety by our congregational response, pledging: “With God’s help, we will so order our lives after the example of Christ, that this child, surrounded by steadfast love, may be established in the faith, and confirmed and strengthened in the way that leads to life eternal” (From Baptismal Covenant, Congregational Pledge II, The Book of Worship). Building on these foundations, we recognize that our faith calls us to offer hospitality and protection to all children, youth, and other vulnerable people, as well as volunteers and employees who

are committed to ministering to them. Worldwide, child abuse and neglect affect children, youth, and other vulnerable people of every age, ethnicity, and economic group. Often, abuse occurs in places where children, youth, and other vulnerable people feel safe—homes, schools, camps, and even churches. According to the U.S. Health and Human Services' recent report, the victim was related to or acquainted with the abuser in more than 90 percent of cases. In light of this, The United Methodist Church and each local United Methodist Church establish policies and procedures that: 1. lessen the possibility that abuse will happen to children, youth, and other vulnerable people in the church; 2. create a place where victims can feel safe in disclosing abuse; 3. protect volunteers and employees who minister with children, youth, and other vulnerable people; and 4. allow known sexual offenders to safely join in a Christian community in the church while protecting the children, youth, and other vulnerable people who are a part of our congregations.

### **Summary of Issues & Scope of the Problem:**

This guide identifies Safe Sanctuaries policy recommendations to protect children, youth, and other vulnerable people; those who share in ministry with them; and known sexual offenders participating as part of our congregations. It is recommended that you use the best practices included in each area to update your local church's Safe Sanctuary policy. Annually updating and adopting a policy reflective of current expertise is essential to create safe environments where ministry happens. Effective implementation is vital to protect our ministry participants and reduce our risk. Effective policy AND implementation create a respectful, loving setting for ministry. Your policy should reflect the unique nature of your congregation, ministry, and setting.

The General Conference of The United Methodist Church, in April 1996, adopted a resolution aimed at reducing the risk of child sexual abuse in the church. The following is a reflection on the adopted resolution (Book of Resolutions, 2016 #3084). A central tenet of the Christian faith is the inherent value and worth of all children, youth, and adults. Children, youth, and other vulnerable people are least able to protect themselves in our society and are particularly vulnerable to abuse and neglect. The United Methodist Church is eager to do all it can to protect the youth, children, and other vulnerable people who participate in the life of this congregation. We believe implementing a policy and adopting procedures to protect our children, youth, and other vulnerable people recognizes that: Our Christian faith calls us to offer both hospitality and protection to our children, youth, and other vulnerable persons. The Social Principles of the United Methodist Church state, “. . . children must be protected from economic, physical and sexual exploitation and abuse.” The social principles also state, “. . . all persons are individuals of sacred worth, created in the image of God.” Tragically, churches have not always been safe places for children, youth, and other vulnerable people. Neglect, sexual abuse, and exploitation occur in churches, both large and small, urban and rural. The problem cuts across all economic, cultural, racial, and ethnic lines. God calls us to make our churches safe places and to protect children, youth, and other vulnerable people from abuse. Abuse prevention and ministry protection policies and procedures are essential for congregations, not only for the protection and safety of our children, youth, and other vulnerable persons but also for our volunteers and staff working with them. The Gospel calls us to be engaged in ministry with children, youth, and other vulnerable persons (Safe Sanctuaries: Reducing the Risk of Abuse in the Church for Children and Youth, page 10).

Jesus taught, “Whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me” (Mark 9:37 NRSV) and “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 NRSV).

We should not allow possible risks to undermine or stop our ministry. Rather, we must:

- Acknowledge the risks and develop a practical plan to address these issues
- Take steps to prevent harm to our children, youth, and other vulnerable persons; and

- Continue to answer the Gospel's imperative to be in ministry with children, youth, and other vulnerable persons, thus making a difference in their lives
- Safe Sanctuaries policies and the implementation of practices that reflect those policies seek to fulfill this call for our church

## **Safe Sanctuaries Policy Template for The Greater New Jersey Annual Conference**

This is the Safe Sanctuaries Policy for (NAME OF CHURCH). As a United Methodist community of faith, we are committed to Wesley's three simple rules- to do no harm, to do good and to stay in love with God. We recognize that our responsibility to the people in our community, especially the most vulnerable among us, is a sacred gift, and we endeavor to treat the safety and upkeep of children, youth and vulnerable peoples as such. The below policy has been developed by our community of faith in conjunction with the standards set by the Greater New Jersey Annual Conference. All entities in this community of faith will be educated about this policy, and will be held to its standards.

**Definitions related to Safe Sanctuaries Policies & Procedures:** *A common set of definitions provides a useful frame of reference for policy development. Churches may have terms specific to their ministry situation indicating the need to modify those listed here or create their own set of definitions.*

Child: *In the United States, this term is commonly used to identify anyone age eleven or younger.*

Youth: Anyone not a "child" and under eighteen (age of legal majority).

Adult: Anyone who has reached the age of legal majority and has finished high school.

Vulnerable person: A person whose ability to protect themselves from violence, abuse, or neglect is significantly impaired through social, physical, or mental disability or illness.

Paid staff person: Someone paid by the church, overseen by the staff/pastor parish relations committee, and screened according to the church's Safe Sanctuary policy and any additional required personnel screening.

Unscreened adult: Someone who has not been screened.

Screened adult: A volunteer who has gone through the screening process involving a criminal background check, reference check, interview, and risk reduction training. These people may or may not be members, but they must be regular attendees and active in the church for at least six months.

Roamer: A Safe Sanctuaries trained/screened adult leader who meets the minimum age requirements as defined in this policy and moves throughout the facility to provide additional oversight and supervision during activities.

Ministry supervisor: A screened individual, staff, or volunteer, responsible for a particular ministry with oversight of the leaders in that ministry.

Physical abuse: Violent, non-accidental contact that results in injury. This includes, but is not limited to, striking, biting, or shaking. Injuries include bruises, fractures, cuts, and burns.

Sexual abuse: Any form of sexual activity with a child/youth/any other vulnerable person, whether at the church, at home, or in any other setting. The abuser may be an adult or another minor.

Emotional abuse: A pattern of intentional conduct that crushes a child's/youth's/other vulnerable person's spirit and attacks his/her self-worth through rejection, threats, terrorizing, isolating, or belittling.

Neglect: When a person with responsibility for a child, youth, or other vulnerable person fails to care for that individual's physical and/or emotional needs.

### **Facts about Abuse:**

- **It Can Happen Anywhere:** The child victim is never responsible for causing the abuse and is never to be blamed. The child victim is never capable of consenting to abusive behavior. Child sexual abuse is ALWAYS wrong and is solely the responsibility of the abuser.
- **Knowing the Statistics:** Studies have estimated that 1 out of 3 girls are sexually abused before the age of 18. Estimates state that 1 out of 7 boys are sexually abused, but the number may be higher because of a reluctance to report occurrences.
- **The Church at Risk:** The risk for churches is especially high because we're seen as "trusting organizations" and we've been "notoriously INACTIVE when it comes to screening volunteers and/or employees who work with kids." Churches routinely provide opportunities for close contact with children.
- **Indicators of Child Abuse:** Children showing anxiety about coming to church or being left in a class or program, or reluctance to participate when he/she had previously been enthusiastic may be an indicator of abusive behaviors. Abused children may have fears of specific individuals experiencing nightmares or showing hostility.
- **Abusers: Who Are They:** Less than 20% are strangers - 93% of victims know their abuser. People who abuse children look and act just like everyone else. Those who sexually abuse children are drawn to settings where they can gain easy access to children, such as sports leagues, faith centers, clubs, and schools.
- **How Does Abuse Happen?** Children are vulnerable, and the abuser is powerful; without a comprehensive strategy against abuse, we are taking a needless risk that harm may be done to our children or our workers with children. Strategies must be supported by the entire congregation and, applied to each worker involved in children's ministries. We need to think carefully about the safety of any- adult/one--child situation. Look for group situations where possible. Set an example by personally avoiding one-adult/one-child situations with children other than your own. There should never be a situation in ministry where one adult is left alone with one child.
- **Consequences of Child Sexual Abuse:** Of foremost importance is the child/ youth or vulnerable adult who has been harmed; he or she must be cared for. The harm that is done to the child/youth/vulnerable adult is entirely life-altering, and every step should be taken to care for the victim- including but not limited to providing support and resources for the continued care and wellbeing of the child/youth/vulnerable adult.
- Many victims are created, including the person harmed, that person's family, the congregation, and often the family of the abuser. The congregation's wounds may continue well beyond litigation - that doesn't provide healing among the members. Litigation can go on for two or more years. Financial consequences are somewhere around \$750,000 if innocent/at least \$1-2 million if proven guilty. No congregation can afford, financially, ethically, or morally, to fail to implement strategies for the reduction and prevention of child sexual abuse.
- **GNJ Insurance:** All churches are covered because the Conference has a policy, and there is an expectation that every church and its programs, is implementing some type of policies and procedures. As is true with most situations, the extent of coverage varies, depending on what the local church has done to proactively prevent abuse from happening.
- **Minimizing Opportunity for Abuse:** If you eliminate one-adult/one-child situations, you'll dramatically lower the risk of sexual abuse for your children/youth/vulnerable adults. Expect programs to perform

careful screening and background checks on all persons working with children/youth/vulnerable adults Youth-serving organizations outside of the local church should have policies in place for dealing with suspicious situations and reports of abuse. Furthermore, these organizations should regularly train their staff to prevent, recognize and react responsibly to child sexual abuse.

**Selection and Screening of Church Staff and Adult Volunteers:** *We should not allow possible risks to undermine or stop our ministry. Rather, we must:*

- *Acknowledge the risks and develop a practical plan to address these issues*
- *Take steps to prevent harm to our children, youth, and other vulnerable persons; and*
- *Continue to answer the Gospel's imperative to be in ministry with children, youth, and other vulnerable persons, thus making a difference in their lives*
- *Safe Sanctuaries policies and the implementation of practices that reflect those policies seek to fulfill this call for our church*

A. The pastor in charge or his/her designee and the staff parish relations committee are charged with the responsibility of developing, implementing, and evaluating the process for recruiting, screening, selecting, training, and supervising non-appointed church staff (§ 258.12 Book of Discipline, 2016).

*The pastor will utilize Ministry Safe for background checks and screenings as well as training for staff and volunteers.*

B. All adults who volunteer with/come into contact with the church's children, youth, and other vulnerable people, and each church-paid staff person, including clergy, will be screened and trained using Ministry Safe.

C. Screening Procedures:

1. Each person being considered to volunteer with/come into contact with children, youth, and/or other vulnerable people, whether as a volunteer or paid staff person, shall fill out a volunteer application (for an appropriate guide to what this application should look like, please refer to the appendix section). Anyone interested in volunteering with youth, children, or vulnerable persons must be a regular attending member for at least six months.

2. Before placing the applicant in a position of responsibility with children, youth, or other vulnerable people, a designated paid staff member or person charged with specific responsibility will interview the applicant and review the written volunteer application.

3. 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 the recovery process may be pertinent to the individual's suitability as a youth, children's or other vulnerable people's ministry worker. 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. When evaluating candidates, the following factors will be considered if an applicant is a survivor of child abuse: A. whether the applicant has previously committed an act of child abuse or molestation (anyone who has maltreated children may not serve in ministry with children, youth, or other vulnerable people); B. the extent of professional counseling the applicant has received; C. the opinion of references, especially professional counselors who have served the applicant; D. the opinion of

leaders in other churches or youth organizations in which the applicant has been involved; how closely the church is able to supervise and monitor the position for which the applicant is applying

4. The person conducting this interview will contact the references provided on the screening form and any additional people as the circumstances dictate. A written record of such contacts will be retained with the screening form.

5. The reference forms, volunteer application, and any notes from the interview will be retained in a designated confidential place even after termination or completion of services. Background checks are not to be deleted from Ministry Safe.

6. Each person applying to work with children, youth, and/or other vulnerable people shall authorize the church to conduct a criminal background check through Ministry Safe.

D. After the interview and background check have been accomplished, the decision will be made to approve or not approve the applicant as a paid staff member/screened adult volunteer who will work with youth, children, and/or other vulnerable people.

E. Where it has been determined that an applicant should not be approved, those people involved with the decision should handle it in a sensitive manner. The pastor in charge or her/his designee should inform the applicant in person. The specific reasons for the decision should be given, whenever possible.

F. It is important that all records (except for the background checks and training reports which are to be kept online in Ministry Safe) be kept in a locked cabinet in the pastor in charge's office. There should be a system in place that offers those who need these records appropriate access and a safe place to be stored to assure confidentiality. These documents should be kept for 20 years.

**Note about Selection and Screening of Church Staff and Adult Volunteers:** *If a known offender wants to participate in ministries within the church, please contact your District Superintendent for resources.*

**Training:** *The pastor in charge or designee and staff parish relations committee shall ensure that regularly scheduled annual training focused on foundational and current issues of child protection is available to and received by those working with children, youth, and other vulnerable people. Attendance at this training shall be required prior to involvement in affected areas of ministry by all paid staff members, screened and unscreened adults, and youth helpers who work consistently with children, youth, and/or other vulnerable people. (At a minimum, the basic training with Ministry Safe is the Sexual Abuse Awareness Training. Based on each individual church's ministry context, other training may be necessary. Please reach out to the Safe Sanctuaries Coordinator for help.) The entire congregation should be educated on the church's Safe Sanctuary Policy.*

### **General Supervision**

1. All activities involving children, youth, and other vulnerable people will be supervised by two screened adults. A designated roamer shall monitor the room when it is impossible to have two leaders present (this should be an exception and not the ideal situation; please refer to UMC Disciple "Roamer Rules" article.)

2. When reasonably feasible, each room set aside for children/youth should have a door with a window. (Windows in doors tend to remove the opportunities for secrecy and isolation, conditions every child abuser seeks.) Half doors should be considered for toddlers to second-grade children to keep them from wandering outside the classroom. Windows should remain free from obstruction; avoid covering them. If there are no windows in the door, the door should remain open.

3. The “two-person rule” is defined as having at least two unrelated people in any classroom or setting, who are screened, adult volunteers or staff persons. When this is not possible, a designated roamer should visit the room regularly. If using a roamer, keep the doors open.

#### Classroom Activities:

1. Crib/Toddler to Second Grade: Two unrelated screened adults will be present for all classroom activities involving infants, toddlers, and children in grades K-2. In addition, a designated roamer should check each classroom on a regular basis. Two adult leaders in the classroom are the expectation; more can be added.

2. Grades 3–5 Two Screened adults will be present for all classroom activities. In addition, a designated roamer should check each classroom on a regular basis. Children should be escorted to and from bathroom facilities or when otherwise leaving the room by either one of the adults or by a designated roamer who checks on all classrooms. Where two adults are not available, the classroom doors are to remain open, and a designated roamer should visit the classroom regularly.

3. Grades 6–12 Classroom activities will be led by at least two screened adults. A designated floater shall monitor the room when it is not possible to have two leaders present. Open Door Policy Parents, volunteers, or staff of the church will be permitted, as reasonableness dictates, to visit and observe all programs and classrooms at any time.

Sign-in/Sign-out Procedure: Adults responsible for children who are infants through toddlers should sign their children in and indicate the names of authorized person(s) to whom the child may be signed out. Adults responsible for children aged 2 through second grade should sign their child in and out of Sunday school and other children’s activities. Non-authorized adults should not be allowed to pick up children. Older siblings, parents, and other adults may be authorized to pick up children when they are identified on a child’s care and information records. This record of authorized adults with pick-up privileges should be updated annually.

Supervision of Non-Classroom Activities: At least two screened adults will be present for all non-classroom activities involving children, youth, and/or other vulnerable people. Any meetings held in an individual’s home will be supervised by at least two screened adults, with two adults present who are not members of the same family. Meetings held in an individual’s home must be pre-approved by the child’s/youth’s/vulnerable person’s parent or guardian.

Counseling of Youth, Children, and Other Vulnerable People: In instances where circumstances dictate that counseling would be most effective on a one-on-one basis, an appropriate paid church staff person may meet individually for a one-on-one conversation with the knowledge of at least one other paid staff member and with permission of a parent or guardian. During any one-on-one conversation with



children, youth, or other vulnerable people, the door of the room used should remain open for the entire session, unless there is glass in the door or wall that gives a clear view into the room. If another adult is not in the building when the counseling occurs, the session should be moved to a public place, such as a restaurant or outside where other people are present

### **Notes about General Supervision:**

NOTE 1: At the initial meeting, the adult should first determine if he/she is qualified to address the child's/youth's/other vulnerable person's needs effectively. Counseling should be limited to no more than three sessions. Referral to another more qualified counselor should always be considered.

NOTE 2: This section is not meant to govern a licensed professional counselor in a paid counseling relationship with a child, youth, or other vulnerable people. Time Following Group Events Following group events, it is inevitable that occasionally a child's/youth's/or other vulnerable person's transportation arrives after all other participants have departed. Two screened leaders should be scheduled to be present until all participants have been picked up. In some circumstances, a child/youth/other vulnerable people may unavoidably be supervised by one screened adult. When this occurs, the screened adult is responsible for exercising his/her best judgment for the participant's well-being as well as his/her own. Example—Have the parents on the phone with you until they arrive.

**Building Compliance Requirements:** Safe Sanctuaries policy applies to all church-operated programs for children, youth, or vulnerable adults. These programs must be clearly differentiated from those that are non-church operated. The following are basic assumptions made as they relate to both church and non-church-operated children, youth, and vulnerable adult programs:

1. All buildings in which such programs are housed shall have any necessary "certificates of occupancy."
2. All groups conducting such programs shall have the necessary certificates of insurance for both liability and workers' compensation. They shall be displayed as required by law.
3. All such programs shall conform to Federal and State wage and tax laws for employees.
4. Any group using the church building should have its own protection policy for children, youth, and young adults.

**Transportation General Rules:** *Transporting children, youth, and other vulnerable people is an important concern. Their safety can be at risk in a variety of ways. Therefore, certain discretion must be used depending upon the event attended, the locale of the event, and the age group participating. This policy includes both requirements and guidelines. When feasible, there should be adherence to the recommendations and the guidelines. It is expected that the requirements will always be followed.*

### **Requirements for Transportation:**

1. Drivers must be screened adults with a Motor Vehicle background-specific check in addition to their background check and Ministry Safe Training.

2. When a child/youth/other vulnerable person is transported in any vehicle, the driver must be either the child's/youth's/other vulnerable person's parent/guardian, a screened adult or a paid staff person who is at least 25 years old.
3. When a child/youth/other vulnerable person is transported in a church-owned vehicle, the driver must be at least 25 years of age; an exception is made when the driver is a paid staff member who is at least 18 years of age and for whom a motor vehicle record search has been made and the record has been found to be satisfactory by the pastor in charge or his/her designee. (This is subject to other church policies, state law, and insurance regulations.)
4. Drivers must have a valid driver's license for the vehicle being operated. For example, if driving a church bus, a commercial driver's license is required. A copy of the driver's license should be on file in the church office.
5. Drivers must require that passengers wear seat belts; the number of passengers must not exceed the number of seat belts.
6. Drivers should be advised of a designated route and should not deviate from it except in cases of emergency or road detours.
7. Drivers should not use cell phones unless required for communication with other drivers. Any use should be hands-free and in accordance with state law. Drivers should not text/message while driving.
8. When a trip is planned and the destination is expected to be 100 miles or more from the point of departure, drivers are to be listed on an "approved driver list" maintained in the church office.
9. People who regularly drive church-owned vehicles are to be listed on an "approved driver list" maintained in the church office.
10. To be listed on the "approved driver list," a motor vehicle record search must have been conducted, and the pastor in charge or his/her designee must determine if the record is satisfactory.
11. Drivers will read and sign an acknowledgment form indicating that the Child, Youth, and Other Vulnerable People Protection Policy has been read and will be followed (See Appendix Section).

**Guidelines for Transportation:**

1. Drivers should be accompanied by at least one other adult and more than one youth.
2. Drivers should receive training for any church-owned vehicle being operated.
3. Youth who drive their own vehicles should be reminded regularly of the importance of vehicle safety.

**Overnights, Trips, Retreats:** *Trip and retreat settings can call for different child/youth/other vulnerable people protection requirements, depending on the circumstances. What follows are the requirements and guidelines of this policy. The requirements should always be implemented. Depending on the circumstances of the setting, who is in attendance, etc., some or all of the guidelines should be implemented as needed. Those in charge of the trip or retreat should be mindful of both requirements and guidelines, in addition to applying their own wisdom to the needs of a given occasion.*

**Requirements for Overnights, Trips, Retreats**

1. There will be at least two screened adults present for all trips, retreats, and other events where the children, youth, and /or other vulnerable people gather overnight at, or away from, the church campus.
2. There will be at least one screened adult for each gender present at coed overnight events. At single-gender overnight events, at least one of the two screened adults present shall be of the same gender as the children/youth/other vulnerable people who are present. In settings where folks are in ministry with LGBTQIA+ or folks who are not within the gender binary, please refer to our appendix section for help on how to create safe spaces for all people.
3. The person in charge of youth/children/other vulnerable people for each overnight trip and/or retreat shall carry parental permission forms, including permission for emergency medical care. (See our appendix section)

**Guidelines in a Hotel Type Setting:** rooms should be assigned as follows:

1. Separate rooms for adults and child/youth/other vulnerable people (where applicable) should be assigned with at least two participants per room except where specific situations dictate a different arrangement.
2. Assignments should be made so that an adult room is between two children's/youth's/other vulnerable person's rooms.
3. Adults should make random monitoring hall trips and room checks at night. This should be done by two adults of the same gender as those being checked. Again, please refer to our appendix section for guidelines in inclusive settings.
4. A hotel should be selected where the rooms are open to the interior of the building (i.e., do not open to the outside).

**Online Safety Use of Electronics or Media Communications Guidelines:** *these may be useful tools in supporting child and youth ministries. However, in such circumstances, the following requirements shall be met:*

1. The volunteer or staff person shall never initiate a connection (friending, following, etc.) on social media.
2. If a child, youth, or other vulnerable person initiates a connection, that individual's parent or guardian as well as the volunteer or staff member's supervisor shall be notified.
3. If an adult leader receives a private text from a child, youth, or other vulnerable people that seems questionable, the leader should immediately end the conversation in the virtual space and offer opportunities to have the conversation in person and in compliance with the earlier guidelines for one-on-one conversations. The ministry supervisor and/or parent/guardian should be made aware of the incident immediately.
  - 3a. Note: If an in-person meeting is not possible, those involved will determine the most reasonable alternative in compliance with the earlier guidelines for one-on-one conversations.
4. Adult leaders should post photos on social network sites only with prior written permission granted by a parent/guardian. When posted, PHOTOS MUST NOT BE TAGGED with names or location indicators. All photos must be appropriate and in keeping with the spirit of the ministry event.

5. All in-person protection policies apply to online platform meetings like Zoom, Skype, Messenger, Facetime, Discord, Instagram and so on. (For example, two unrelated adults should be present in the virtual room just as they would be in a physical room.) We recommend using caution and understanding platforms before using them, and we do not recommend apps like Snapchat or anything that deletes messages.
6. All online activities should use the official church account, not a personal account.
7. Communication about online meetings should be shared with parents/guardians as well as with children, youth, and other vulnerable people.
8. Adult leaders and participants should use their real names as usernames.
9. Attendance of online meetings should be documented.
10. All electronic communications shall be documented and retained.

**Responding to Allegations of Child Abuse:** *Some form of mandatory reporting is present in every state in the U.S. Voluntary reporting is available in every state. While legal requirements may vary from state to state, the moral mandate to report child abuse or neglect is a requirement for all who care for and lead ministry with children, youth, and other vulnerable people. The pastor in charge or her/his designee should identify applicable laws for the church/ministry based on state and local statutes and include both the substance of the law and the pertinent reporting procedures in their local Safe Sanctuary policy.*

**The procedure of Responding to Allegations of Child Abuse:**

- A. Immediately, yet with dignity and respect for the sacred worth of the accused, remove the accused from further involvement with children, youth, and/or other vulnerable people. Once the proper authorities have been contacted and the alleged victim's safety is secured, the pastor in charge or other designated people should inform the accused that abuse has been reported.
- B. If abuse is observed by, disclosed to, or suspected by a volunteer and/or paid staff member of the church, the observer shall report the incident immediately to the ministry supervisor and the pastor in charge. Suppose the pastor in charge is not available or is implicated in the abuse. In that case, the matter should be immediately reported to the district superintendent and the proper authorities, as required by state and local law. The district superintendent will take responsibility, acting in accordance with the established rules of The Book of Discipline with respect to claims against a pastor. If the district superintendent is not available, the incident should be reported to the bishop's office immediately.

**Reporting in PA:** 1-800-932-0313 (Child Line) for more information or to report online, [click here](#). For [information about who is a mandated reporter in PA, click here](#).

**Reporting in NY:** 1-800-342-3720 (New York State Child Protective Services) for more information on reporting and to understand who is a mandated reporter, and a voluntary reporter, [please click here](#).

**Reporting in NJ:** 1-877-652-2873 (Department of Children and Families) for more information on reporting, [please click here](#).

C. Notify the parents/guardian(s) of the victim and take whatever steps are necessary to assure the safety and wellbeing of the child, youth, or other vulnerable people until the parent(s) or guardian(s) arrive. NOTE: If one or both of the parents is the alleged abuser, follow the advice of local authorities concerning notification of others.

D. Take all allegations seriously and reach out to the victim and the victim's family. Show care and support to help prevent further hurt. Remember that the care and safety of the victim is the first priority. Respond in a positive and supportive manner to the victim and the victim's family.

E. The church should provide a supportive atmosphere to all those who are affected, offering both objectivity and empathy as it seeks to create a climate in which healing can take place.

F. After having reported the suspected abuse to the proper authorities, the pastor in charge is to report the incident immediately to the district superintendent if he/she has not already done so. If the district superintendent is unavailable, the incident should be reported to the [bishop's office](#).

G. Keep a written report of the steps taken by the church in response to the reported abuse. (See Child/Youth/ Other Vulnerable Person Protection Incident Report Form in our appendix section). The report should be brief and contain only factual information relevant to the situation. It should be kept in a secure place. The report should be written in ink or typed to prevent it from being changed.

H. Any contact with the media should be handled by the pastor in charge.

#### **Notes on Procedure of Responding to Allegations of Child Abuse:**

NOTE 1: The conference communications department is a good source of help when media questions arise. The church spokesperson should generally convey a spirit of concern for the spiritual, physical, and emotional well-being of all who are affected and assure that the matter is being diligently and appropriately handled.

NOTE 2: The question that sometimes arises is: "What about confidential communication with a clergyperson?" Many states have laws addressing "clergy confidentiality." Thus, a clergyperson may be confronted with the dilemma of discovering or suspecting abuse in the setting of a privileged conversation. While the church has historically placed a high value on clergy keeping such confidences, the 2016 United Methodist Book of Discipline, par. 341.5, provides an exception in cases of suspected child abuse or neglect. Again, the moral imperative is to do what will best protect children.

**Implementation of Safe Sanctuaries Policies:** *The Pastor, SPRC and Church Council will ensure that the church has a Ministry Safe Administrator and a yearly refresher for the entire congregation on the importance of Safe Sanctuaries and any updates to the Safe Sanctuary Policy.*

Churches will utilize Ministry Safe for their background checks and their training. The Ministry Safe Administrator is in charge of sending background checks and training to volunteers and staff.

#### **Congregational Covenant and Adoption:**

Congregational Covenant and Adoption (CHURCH NAME) United Methodist Church's purpose for establishing this Child, Youth, and Vulnerable People Protection Policy and accompanying procedures is to demonstrate our total and unwavering commitment to the physical wellbeing, emotional safety, and spiritual growth of all our children, youth, and vulnerable people. We adopt this policy in accordance with the statement we as a congregation make at each baptism that we will "nurture children and youth in the Christian faith and life and include them in our care." With this policy, we renew our baptismal pledge to "live according to the example of Christ" and surround children, youth, and other vulnerable people with a "community of love and forgiveness, that they may grow in their trust of God, and be thus confirmed and strengthened in the way that leads to life eternal" (Baptismal Covenant II, United Methodist Book of Worship, p.96). This policy coordinates and supersedes the previous policies used by (CHURCH NAME) UMC. As a Christian community of faith and a United Methodist congregation, we are committed to conduct the ministry of the gospel in ways that assure the safety and spiritual growth all our children, youth, and vulnerable people, as well as all the workers with the children, youth, and vulnerable people.

By this policy and its accompanying procedures, we implement prudent operational procedures in all programs and events:

- a. Training: We will conduct training on this policy and its procedures to assure that adults involved in children's, youth's, and vulnerable people's activities are aware of these standards and will abide by them.
- b. Screening: All adults and minors above the age of fourteen who have direct involvement with activities covered by this policy and its procedures will be screened in accordance with Greater New Jersey Annual Conference policy. All people who are subject to this policy will be rescreened every three (3) years. Any person who was screened but, for whatever reason, has been absent from the (CHURCH NAME) UMC community for more than one (1) year and thereafter returns, will be rescreened.
- c. Supervision: All activities covered by this policy and its procedures will be supervised by the appropriate number of screened adults.

Conclusion: In all our ministries with children, youth, and vulnerable people, (CHURCH NAME) United Methodist Church is committed to demonstrating the love of Jesus Christ so that each of God's children here will be "surrounded by steadfast love, established in the faith, and confirmed and strengthened in the way that leads to life eternal." ("Baptismal Covenant 11," United Methodist Hymnal, p.44.)

This Child, Youth, and Other Vulnerable People Protection Policy is adopted by action of the of the (CHURCH NAME) United Methodist Church this (DAY) day of (MONTH) , (YEAR) .