

# Milford Hills United Methodist Church

## Safe Sanctuary Guidelines



*“Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the Kingdom of God belongs to such as these.”*  
– Mark 10:14

*“See that you do not despise one of these little ones, for I tell you that in heaven their angels always see the face of my Father who is in heaven.”* – Matthew 18:10

*“When Mary and Joseph had finished everything required by the law of the Lord, they returned to Galilee, to their own town of Nazareth. The child grew and became strong, filled with wisdom; and the favor of God was upon him!”* – Luke 2:40

*“To all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God...”* – John 11:12

The 1996 General Conference of the United Methodist Church adopted the resolution aimed to reduce the risk of child sexual abuse in the local churches. This resolution has been reaffirmed and continued by each successive General Conference.<sup>1</sup>

Because our church is a community of faith—a safe haven and sanctuary- where our children, youth, and vulnerable adults can be strengthened and confirmed in the way that leads to life eternal, Milford Hills United Methodist Church (hereafter known as MHUMC) is implementing this plan to prevent abuse. In keeping with our Covenant of Baptism, God has called us to create a community where our children, youth and vulnerable adults grow in safety and strength, therefore we commit our resources and selves to the nurture of these persons.

We promise our children that we will provide the structure, education, and the policies that will keep them safe from abuse and harm. In that context we will screen and train volunteers and staff. We ask that each volunteer and staff abide by the policies of MHUMC. MHUMC has established this policy following a conference training session held at this church on April 16<sup>th</sup>, 2016.

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<sup>1</sup> Joy Thornburg Melton, *Safe Sanctuaries: Reducing the Risk of Abuse in the Church for Children and Youth*. (Nashville: Discipleship Resources, 2008), 11.

## **POLICY DEFINITIONS:**

The **State of North Carolina** defines a child as anyone from birth to age eighteen. MHUMC designates a difference between children (nursery-5th grade) and youth (6<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup> grade) in our programming.

**Abuse** refers to an action or inaction by a parent, leader, staff, advisor or teacher that harms or threatens a child/youth/vulnerable adult's<sup>2</sup> physical or mental health and well-being. Abuse may include the following forms: physical abuse, sexual abuse, emotional abuse, verbal abuse, or ritual abuse.

## **INFORMATION FOR PARENTS/CAREGIVERS:**

The **KEY** to any relationship is communication. We encourage you to get to know your child/youth/vulnerable adult's teachers and leaders. While we will do everything possible to ensure safety, **YOU** are the best advocate for your son, daughter, or relative.

If you believe your child/youth/adult is experiencing any form of mistreatment (injury, bullying, gossip, etc.)- contact their group leader directly. We ask this, as we may not be aware of the situation. Similarly, if you have concerns about your child/youth/adult group leader, please trust your instincts and contact a staff member as soon as possible.

Any person convicted of a violent crime or abuse against a child/youth/vulnerable adult **CANNOT** serve as a volunteer or provide a service for a church-related activity.

You may feel confident that the staff and leaders hold the safety of your child/youth/adult in the highest regard. We have taken great care to develop policies, standards, and procedures to increase safety while your child/youth/adult is involved.

These guidelines are by no means exhaustive. Please feel free to contact your child/youth/adult's leader anytime with questions/concerns or contact a staff member directly at 704-636-0471. For more information, please feel free to attend one of our Safe Sanctuary Training classes held annually.

## **COMPONENTS OF THE PROGRAM:**

Everyone desiring to work with our children/youth/vulnerable adults at MHUMC, whether paid staff or volunteers, must go through our Safe Sanctuary Program. This program has four components, which will be reviewed on the next pages:

- Screening
- Training
- Supervision
- Reporting

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<sup>2</sup> A vulnerable adult is a person over the age of 18 who has special needs, such as: physical impairments, wheelchair needs, mental dementia, cognitive disabilities, or emotional instabilities (this list is not exhaustive and could include other issues.)

**SCREENING:**

Protective screening includes the following: application, reference checks, personal interview, and criminal background checks.

- Application (see VOLUNTEER APPLICATION attached)
- Reference Form (3 unrelated persons, meaning not related by blood or marriage)
- Personal Interview with either the compliance officer, who is our Director of Family Ministries, or our Pastor
- Criminal Background Check using Trak-1 Technology (information will be kept confidential and will be used on a need-to-know basis)

All staff and volunteers will be screened. Our church's screening procedures should be equally applied to ALL workers (paid and volunteer, clergy and lay) who will interact with children, youth and vulnerable adults, and will be renewed every three years.

Screening reduces the risk of:

- a child abuser being recruited to work with your children
- your church being accused of negligent hiring practices
- false allegations being brought against workers<sup>3</sup>

In wanting to be compassionate to persons who have been accused or convicted of a sexual offense we are implementing a "Buddy System" in our church. A "buddy" system would assign a Trustee member or designee of the church to be with an accused or convicted sex offender at all times and places while there is a church activity in progress (worship and programming where children, youth and vulnerable adults are in attendance). This is a protective measure for all parties' safety.

**TRAINING:**

Our Training class will be held **annually** at MHUMC by a Compliance Officer/Pastor/or Conference Representative and training will be a requirement for all persons serving our children and youth programs. This will include: all staff, volunteers, advisors, the Trustee Board members, and teachers. Parents are also encouraged to attend. This training is to raise awareness of child abuse issues and cover the Do's and Don'ts of our ministry.

All training classes will include a review of all our Procedures and Forms.

This training is also to be included in all New Member classes and will be made available and publicized to all members of our congregation.

All participants will be asked to complete a Leadership Covenant form after the training.

Components of the Training:

- Parent's guide of prevention of child abuse
- Definitions of child abuse
- Possible indicators of abuse

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<sup>3</sup> Joy Thornburg Melton, *Safe Sanctuaries: Reducing the Risk of Abuse in the Church for Children and Youth*. (Nashville: Discipleship Resources, 2008), 17.

- Strategies used by most molesters
- Disclosure by a victim and how you are to respond
- Code of conduct for leaders, teachers, advisors and staff
- Documentation

## **SUPERVISION:**

Supervision is done primarily by the Compliance Officer and Pastor, but we ALL have a role in keeping one another accountable. Our goal is to ensure that the interactions taking place by the leaders, volunteers, staff and advisors are appropriate and above reproach. Supervision takes place for the protection of the children/youth/vulnerable adults as well as our leaders.

Only persons who have been actively participating at MHUMC for at least 6 months are eligible to work with our children/youth/vulnerable adults. This 6 months will include: regular attendance at worship and active in a small group ministry. This participant must also profess the Christian faith and align with the beliefs of the UMC.

At least 2 UNRELATED adults (unrelated by blood or marriage) or 1 adult and 1 youth (in certain settings) should be present for any church sponsored event involving children/youth. Any youth assisting in these capacities must have Staff approval, and be trained in the Safe Sanctuary policies of our congregation. All teachers who supervise must be 18 years of age—no youth shall make supervisory decisions.

Adequate personnel must be provided and maintained before and after an event until ALL children/youth are in the custody of their parents or guardians.

A PERMISSION-RELEASE form will be required for every youth/child in off premises activities. Permission forms must be turned in for each and every event.

A MEDICAL form for each child/youth will be submitted by parents/guardians annually, forms will be kept on file in the church office with access being granted in case medical need/emergencies. This form is separate from a TRAVELING medical form (i.e.-mission trips). Visitors will not be required to submit a form unless they become regular attendees of any activities of the church.

MHUMC rooms used by our children and youth will have all doors equipped with WINDOWS. The glass panel cannot be covered and should allow for monitoring of all spaces within a classroom or area. If glass panels are not in place, the door to the classroom must remain open at all times. One person is designated as a Floater during events including children/youth, and should make unscheduled visits to check on all classrooms and areas. The Sunday School Superintendent will either be the designated floater or choose a floater, and one alternate.

All children at the church are the responsibilities of their parents/guardians and will NOT be unattended without specific written parental permission—example—to allow children to come to the parents' classrooms or to meet them in the sanctuary for worship.

No child or youth should be alone with ONE adult leader at any time or in any situation. If it is impossible to provide 2 adults in each area, the door to the classrooms **MUST** remain open at all times, or have a glass panel in the doors of the classroom and a floater must be used.

ALL persons working with our children/youth must be at **LEAST** 5 years older than the oldest child or youth in the group.

Chaperones **MUST** be of the same sex as the children/youth in overnight trips as a group. One to seven ratios are appropriate for church events.

The Pastor's study should have a small glass, narrow window in the door as well as in any other room used for Pastoral Counseling or Consultation. An open door policy may also be used in the Pastor's study when necessary, but confidentiality is to be upheld. A second staff member or an officer of the church should be in the office building when the counseling is taking place. In emergency situations, the pastor will use discretion to make decisions about counseling.

No child/youth should be alone at any time in the church building. Each child/youth must be with a buddy at all times. This definitely applies to travel, overnight plans and events.

Persons will be **EXCLUDED** from leading a church related function if they have ever been convicted of abuse. All others will be reviewed on a case by case basis.

## **REPORTING:**

All persons, as an employee or a volunteer of children, youth, and vulnerable adults **HAVE** a responsibility to **REPORT** any actual or suspected abuse or neglect, past or present, anywhere in the person's life including at church, home, school, the park, or in the community. After careful, through investigation by trained staff, we report to the state authorities and local authorities any case of **SUSPECTED** child abuse toward a minor/vulnerable person.

We radically love others, because our Lord loved us first, therefore our procedure for reporting and our plan of response is designed to promote safety for all children of God.

- When a volunteer or staff member of a MHUMC sponsored event **SUSPECTS** that abuse (of any form) is taking place or has taken place, he or she may report the abuse on his/her own initiative and do so anonymously.
- Reports will be made to the North Carolina Department of Social Services of Rowan County @ 704-216-8498 and/or the appropriate law enforcement agency (Salisbury Police –704-638-5333 or use 911) **IMMEDIATELY** if warranted, **BUT** in no event later than 24 hours. These numbers will be posted at **ALL** church phones in and around the church buildings, especially the nursery and children's classrooms.
- The teacher, advisor, or leader will also **EXPEDITIOUSLY** notify the church Pastor, Director of Family Ministries or church administrator **IMMEDIATELY** if warranted, but no later again than a 24 hour

period of the suspected abuse and how this report was made.

- The pastor, Director of Family Ministries, administrative assistant, or staff member (in charge of that event or class) will complete and file the FORM FOR REPORTING SUSPECTED ABUSE and will notify the Trustee committee so that the church INSURANCE/liability provider can be contacted.
- Notify the parents/guardians or appropriate contact for the possible victim and take any necessary steps to assure the child/youth's safety until the parents arrive. The safety of all involved parties is the church's primary concern. We want to show care and compassion for all involved.
- MHUMC will be supportive of the individuals, who in good faith make reports of actual or reasonably suspected cases of abuse. ALL reports will be taken seriously, but will NOT be judged prematurely.
- DO not confront the accused abuser with anger and hostility. Treat him or her with respect and dignity, but immediately remove him/her from contact with children/youth/vulnerable persons and all responsibilities until the investigation is completed and the allegations are clear or substantiated.
- The Senior Pastor or the Chairperson of the Staff Parish Relations Committee shall communicate the complaint to the District Superintendent within 24 hours. After the local authorities have been called, the Trustees Chairperson shall be notified of details and a written step by step report shall be submitted ASAP. The forms will be kept in the church office in a locked file.
- If any complaint comes to the attention of the media, then, only the Senior Pastor and the District Superintendent shall make the release to the media. The administrative assistant shall have a prepared statement before releasing information to the media, with the names and numbers of the 2 designated persons –the Pastor and the Superintendent. ALL other persons at the church and all members MUST refrain from speaking to the media!!
- Under NO circumstances should the person who received the report of the alleged offense attempt to conduct any further investigation of the situation on his/her own time and initiative.
- The Senior Pastor and/ or Chairperson of the Staff-Parish Relations Committee shall prepare a brief and honest statement that can be made to the congregation WITHOUT giving unnecessary details, placing blame, interfering with the victim's privacy or violating any confidentiality concerns.
- If any Pastor of MHUMC is implicated in a complaint, the complaint shall be communicated IMMEDIATELY to the District Superintendent and the Chairperson of the Staff-Parish Relations Committee, and the Conference rules will be put into place ASAP.

MHUMC is also required to report ALL injuries that happen to anyone on church property or during church activities, and document these accidents. The Trustees should be notified of the incident within 24 hours. The accident form will include: date, time, description, follow-up and signatures of the injured person and the staff person in charge.

**TRAVEL AND OVERNIGHT PROCEDURES:**

Any activity that requires travel from the church MUST have a written permission form and medical insurance information from the parent/guardian of the child/youth. The permission/ medical forms must stay with the staff member/coordinator for the entire trip. Copies will also be kept in the vehicle where the child/youth will be traveling and in the church office.

All medical forms and copies of insurance MUST be submitted by ALL adult chaperones and staff members—anyone that is participating in all events that include travel or overnight stays.

We will always give advance notice and information regarding any activity in which your child/youth will be participating which deviates from the traditional classroom instruction offered at MHUMC (i.e.-VBS, camps, etc.).

Participation Covenants will be signed by child/youth that outline the expectations of behavior and consequences of breaking covenants. Parents will be expected to pay for TRAVEL HOME if the child/youth breaks these covenant agreements.

Youth who are of appropriate age may drive to and from events on church property with parental permission. Youth may also drive to events that are within Rowan County with parental permission. Youth driving to a destination within the county will meet at the destination. Youth are expected to travel as part of the group on any trip that is outside of Rowan County.

No youth may leave the church property with any person other than their parents/guardian without express written permission in advance.

If an arrangement is previously made with the parents that one youth needed to ride with another parent to a destination it must be affirmed by BOTH sets of parents using the signed form provided.

**VAN USAGE:**

See attached VAN GUIDELINES.

**OVERNIGHT YOUTH RETREATS OR MISSION TRIPS:**

- When there are both male and female youth going on a trip there must be both male and female counselors (one to seven ratio). Counselors must be at least 21 years of age.
- Youth shall not share a bed with any adult. A minimum of three persons shall be assigned to a room, males and females housed in separate rooms.
- Visitation between males and females in bedrooms is prohibited unless directly supervised in a group setting with the counselors for devotional or group discussion times.
- If the option is available – a hotel shall be chosen where the rooms open to the interior of the building, rather than the outside. This reduces the danger of strangers from the street.

### **ADDITIONAL INFORMATION REGARDING YOUNGER CHILDREN:**

- A sign-in/sign-out procedure will be utilized in the nursery when bringing children in and picking them up. Parent(s) must provide a list of adults who are granted permission to pick the child up from the nursery. This list must be signed by the parent to authorize the listed persons.
- All Diapers/Supplies needed when baby/toddler is in the church nursery must be provided by the parent(s). It is also the responsibility of the parent(s) to provide any directions of care, let us know of any special needs the child may have, and a list of known allergies/medications.
- Diapers shall be changed in an area visible to others
- If a teacher must assist a small child in the restroom, the door to the restroom shall remain open. Older children who do not require assistance in the restroom, should be given the privacy of being alone with the door closed.

### **ADDITIONAL INFORMATION REGARDING OLDER CHILDREN AND YOUTH:**

- **Clothing:** Students are not permitted to wear clothing that is sexually suggestive or spiritually degrading. T-shirts or other clothing with vulgar, illegal, or inappropriate content will not be permitted. In addition there should be: no midriffs, no low-cut tops, no spaghetti straps (tank tops must have straps at least two fingers wide), no see through clothing, and no sagging pants (no boxers or underwear showing). Dress shorts or jean shorts must have at least a 4 inch inseam, and athletic shorts must be properly fitting with an inseam of at least 2.5 inches (not rolled up). Ladies are required to wear modest bathing suits such as tankinis. Guys— no Speedos.
  - Those deemed to be wearing inappropriate clothing by the Director of Family Ministries or youth volunteers will be given a large, over-sized t-shirt to wear over their clothes.
  - Those wearing swim suits deemed to be inappropriate by the Director of Family Ministries or youth volunteers will be required to wear a dark over-sized t-shirt over their swim suits.
  - The parents of repeat offenders will be notified. If the inappropriate dress continues, further disciplinary actions including suspension may be taken.
- **Electronics:** Electronic devices tend to cause disruptions in our youth meetings, quarrels between students, or the isolation of individuals. Therefore, the use of cell phones, iPods, cameras or other personal electronic or entertainment devices is prohibited during worship, activities, and services unless otherwise stated by the Director of Family Ministries or leader.
  - Bringing these devices on trips is discouraged. The devices are allowed but may only be used during designated times. If students choose to bring such devices on trips, they do so at their own risk. The Director of Family Ministries, volunteers, and the church does not take responsibility for the safe return of these items.
  - Devices used during undesignated/inappropriate times, whether on the church premises or on trips, will be confiscated until the end of the service, trip, or event.

### **TECHONOLOGY & SOCIAL MEDIA POLICY:**

- **Cell Phone Usage:**
  - Employees of MHUMC may use their personal cell phones to communicate with members of the congregation and potential members. All staff will vow to keep one another accountable by being honest and transparent about their cell phone usage. Mass/group texts and emails may be



used for assured transparency. Periodically, a staff member will allow another to check calls and messages made and received.

- The Director of Family Ministries may contact youth and youth parents using their personal cell phone. However, again, transparency and honesty is key. If there is ever a concern or question about the Director of Family Ministries' use of a cell phone to communicate with youth, please contact the Director of Family Ministries. If there is ever a problem or issue with the Director of Family Ministries utilizing a cell phone, contact the Pastor or Staff Parish Chairperson.
- Internet Usage:
  - The best strategy for the prevention of social media misconduct in ministry is education, conversation, covenant, and accountability. Staff and those that manage technology, websites, and social media outlets for MHUMC will be trained how to properly this policy and have a continued discussion on how to improve this policy as technology changes.
  - Note that in social media and online communications, the dividing line between public and private information, as well as personal and professional information, may be difficult to discern. Whenever any one of us identifies ourselves as an employee/volunteer of MHUMC online, we are connected to other employees, members, volunteers, supporters, and prospective members. It is important to ensure that any posted content associated with you is consistent with the church's values and standards.
  - Be respectful of others. MHUMC's social media will not be used to post and disseminate discriminatory comments or content, harassment, threats of violence, criminal acts or behavior, abuse of any type, bullying, hate speech, or demeaning comments.
  - MHUMC's social media will not be used to share, reveal, or disseminate confidential or proprietary information, including financial information, counseling information, or information on any legal matters.
  - No posts of pornography, vulgarity, obscenity, nudity, or partial nudity in text, photos, or videos will be allowed for any purpose at any time.
  - Only specific employees are authorized to speak on behalf of the church in an official capacity. Therefore, be sure to designate your postings and/or comments as your own and not those of MHUMC. When making your own comments, the church expects that you will use your personal accounts, not the church's. When necessary, MHUMC prefers that your personal posts be accompanied by a statement that the postings are your own and do not reflect MHUMC opinions or values.
  - Postings deemed inappropriate by church leadership will be removed.
  - Before posting anything, remember that you - the employee or volunteer - are responsible for the post's content. Before you click Send, take a break. Do not post in haste or anger. Consider the consequences of the post, and restrain yourself if there is a chance you are not being reasonable. Remember that comments you think you are making anonymously can potentially be traced back to you or the church. Privacy settings are not foolproof and cannot be relied on to protect identity. If you have any doubt about the validity or reasonableness of the post, don't send it without consulting the ministry leader or Pastor.
  - Posting MHUMC's logo or any trademarked images is prohibited without advance permission.
  - Written Covenants that lay out these expectations will be signed by all employees and volunteers (see SOCIAL MEDIA USE POLICY forms attached).
  - All staff and volunteers will help to keep one another accountable as much as possible in the online realm. If anyone breaks the social media covenant that MHUMC has agreed to uphold, one will be required to meet with the Pastor and other appropriate leaders to remedy the

situation. Other consequences, sure as dismissal from their volunteer position, may also be utilized. These will be judged on a case-by-case basis.

- Authorization from parent(s) will be required to use any photo or video of children/youth in any capacity within the church or on the internet. Authorization forms must be collected yearly (see AUTHORIZATION FORM FOR PHOTO AND VIDEO USAGE attached).
- Emails on church computers are subject to being read by a third-party when needed in order to keep staff accountable.

### **PREVENTATIVE CARE, SAFETY, AND FIRST AID:**

- First Aid Kits: the church will maintain at least 3 first aid kits, with one placed in the church kitchen, the nursery, and the church van. (All First Aid Kit locations will be posted on fire evacuation maps.)
- In all buildings, fire evacuation routes will be posted and fire extinguishers and smoke alarms maintained annually. Trustees will be responsible for these items. (Fire extinguishers locations will be posted on fire evacuation maps.)
- For information on inclement weather, see attached WEATHER POLICY.
- At least one adult present at every church activity should be certified in basic CPR/First Aid. The Trustee Committee will ensure that the church offers a course for CPR/First Aid at least annually for staff and volunteers, especially those working with children, youth, and older adults. All employees should obtain and maintain certification.
- The church will provide adequate liability insurance for their facilities and church van in case of accident or injury to anyone participating in a church sponsored activity. The insurance will include coverage for sexual and other forms of abuse.
- The Family Life Team will provide a bi-annual program for Parents/Families that will focus on ministry, education, and resources for families as a unit. This is for families in any stage of life.
- MHUMC will provide age and activity appropriate equipment for children and youth. All equipment will be maintained, kept up-to-date, and clean. The Trustees will ensure the outdoor playground is kept in good condition. The Nursery Director will ensure all equipment for infants and toddlers in the nursery is appropriate and sanitary. Blankets or other items such as these will be washed weekly.

### **BUILDING USAGE POLICY:**

See attached BUILDING USAGE GUIDELINES.

**LIST OF FORMS ATTACHED TO COMPLETE THIS POLICY:**

- Volunteer Application
- Reference Check Form
- Authorization and Request for Criminal Records Check
- Safe Sanctuary Participation and Leadership Covenant
- Event Permission Release Form
- Medical Release/Permission to Treat Form
- Report of Suspected Incident of Child Abuse
- Accident Report Form
- Youth Participation Covenant
- Van Use Policy
- Social Media Use Policy for Employees
- Social Media Use Policy for Volunteers
- Authorization Form for Photo and Video Usage
- Winter Event Policy
- Building Usage Guidelines