

## SAFE SANCTUARY POLICY FOR HARLEM UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

### Introduction

**The General Conference of the United Methodist Church, in April 1996, adopted a resolution aimed at reducing the risk of child and vulnerable adult\* abuse in the church. The adopted resolution includes the following statement:**

Jesus said, “Whoever welcomes [a] child...welcomes me (Matthew 18:5).” Children are our present and our future, our hope, our teachers, our inspiration. They are full participants in the life of the church and in the realm of God. Jesus also said, “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).” Our Christian faith calls us to offer both hospitality and protection to the little ones, the children. The Social Principles of the United Methodist Church state that “children must be protected from economic, physical, and sexual exploitation, and abuse.”

Tragically, churches have not always been safe places for children. Child sexual abuse, exploitation, and ritual abuse (ritual abuse refers to abusive acts committed as part of ceremonies or rites; ritual abusers are often related to cults or pretend to be) occur in churches, large and small, urban and rural. The problem cuts across all economic, cultural, and racial lines.

God calls us to make our churches safe places, protecting children and other vulnerable persons from sexual and ritual abuse. God calls us to create communities of faith where children grow safe and strong. This is stated in The Book of Resolutions of the United Methodist Church—1996 (copyrighted in 1996, the United Methodist Publishing House, pp. 384-386). It is required of us by the General Conference mandate of 1996, 2000, 2004, and Paragraph 256 of the 2008 Book of Discipline.

Therefore, in covenant with all United Methodist congregations, we adopt this policy for the prevention of all types of abuse of children and vulnerable adults and for the protection of the staff and volunteers of Harlem United Methodist Church.

### Purpose

**Our congregation’s purpose for establishing this Safe Sanctuary Policy is to demonstrate our absolute and unwavering commitment to the physical safety, emotional well-being, and spiritual growth of all our children, youth, and vulnerable adults.**

## POLICY

We will strive to keep children, youth, and vulnerable adults safe in all ministries of Harlem United Methodist Church (hereafter referred to as HUMC) by:

---

\* Vulnerable adult is defined as any person over the age of 18 years of age who may be more at risk for abuse because of mental or physical disabilities or advanced age.

1. Implementing procedures that support and protect the physical, emotional, and physical development of children, youth, and vulnerable adults in ongoing programs, special events, and off-site trips;
2. Implementing procedures that support and protect church members who work with children, youth, and vulnerable adults;
3. Enacting safety measures in the selection and recruitment of workers with children and youth;
4. Educating paid workers and volunteers in the youth and children's programs about the relevant policy and procedures for HUMC;
5. Informing all church leaders and all volunteers involved in youth and children's ministries about how to recognize abuse and the procedures necessary for reporting;
6. Monitoring and updating procedures as necessary, reviewing the policy on no less than an annual basis.

### **SUPERVISION AND MAINTENANCE OF THE POLICY**

The Trustees, or its designated representative, shall maintain all paperwork necessary for implementing and monitoring this policy.

The Senior Pastor will appoint the person or persons (staff or volunteer) with the responsibility of the oversight of the Safe Sanctuary Policy. These policies govern all activities held by the church that involve children and youth under the age of 18 or any individuals with a mental age under 18.

The church staff and volunteers who supervise children, youth and vulnerable adults are charged with enforcing the policy and procedures. Any violation of these policies and procedures can result in an immediate dismissal, disciplinary action, or reassignment to another area of work at the discretion of the Trustees and/or the Staff Parish Relations Committee.

Anyone who suspects this policy and procedures are not being enforced should bring it to the attention of the person appointed responsible for the oversight of the Safe Sanctuary Policy and Procedures or to the Senior Pastor.

An up-to-date copy of the Safe Sanctuary Policy will be available on the church website, the church office, and will be given to all new members. All church members will be made aware of it and encouraged to review it.

### **SPECIFIC POLICIES AND PROCEDURES**

#### **Definitions**

Primary Workers: the primary leaders of youth or children's activities. To work with youth (grades 6<sup>th</sup> and above), the primary worker must be a minimum of 21 years of age or 5 (five) years older than the oldest youth with whom they are working. To work with children (infant—5<sup>th</sup> grade), the primary worker must be a minimum of 18 years of age.

Secondary Workers: persons who lend aid to the primary worker and act at the direction of the primary worker. Whether working with youth or children, assistants must be:

1. a minimum of 15 years of age and at least 5 (five) years older than the youth or children with whom they are working and
2. In the judgment of a HUMC staff member, competent to assist in the activity.

Floater: a person in the role of being actively present in the hallway and/or checking in with each room to ensure that primary workers are following church procedures. Floaters are available to assist teachers in different rooms as needed. Floaters must meet the same requirements as primary workers.

## **REQUIREMENTS FOR VOLUNTEERS**

### **Involvement in the Life of the Church**

Any person wishing to work with the youth or children must have been a member of the church or have been a steady visitor for a minimum of six months before being allowed to volunteer. This policy can be waived by the Senior Pastor when needed (see the Exceptions Procedure section).

### **Background Checks: Revision by SPRC on September 24, 2012 and accepted by the Board of Trustees on October 16, 2012.**

Any primary worker, secondary, floaters, and ANYONE working with the children and/or the youth of HUMC must undergo a national and state criminal background check. Any history of sex crimes or violent felonies will immediately disqualify a candidate from being able to work with the children and/or youth of Harlem United Methodist Church. All other histories will be reviewed by a case-by-case basis by the safe sanctuary committee or coordinator. Background checks on primary workers must be repeated every five years, but the coordinator reserves the right to repeat background checks at any time.

### **Required Training**

1. **First Aid and CPR Training:** Since the safety of our children, youth, and vulnerable adults is a top priority, the church will hold training classes at least once a year in both First Aid and CPR. All paid staff that work with children and youth, including paid nursery workers, will be required to be up-to-date on infant and child CPR. All children and youth workers will be invited and encouraged to participate.
2. **Bi-Annual Training:** All primary workers must attend a bi-annual training event. The church will provide a training event that will provide information on child abuse and explain any changes made to the Safe Sanctuary Policy. This training event may or may not be held in conjunction with the First Aid and CPR training event.

### **Classroom Procedures**

1. **Two Worker Rule:** In all classrooms, there will be at least one primary and one secondary worker in the room when children or youth are present. This policy is for the protection of everyone. When two workers are not available, an active floater may be designated to assist with more than one classroom (see definition for floater mentioned

earlier). If at all possible, these classrooms should be located together and if only one adult is in the classroom, the door should remain open.

2. **Classroom Doors:** All classrooms doors must have at least one window; windows must not be covered with decorations at any time.
3. **Open Door Counseling:** Any one-on-one counseling session with a child, youth, or vulnerable adult should be done with the door open if possible. If the nature of the counseling requires a closed door, a second adult should be asked to be in the room. If that is not acceptable to the child or youth who wish to share, a second adult should be notified and stay nearby, but not necessarily within hearing distance. Those in the room should sit in a manner that they are visible to the second adult through the window of the door.
4. **Sign-In and Sign-Out:** As a precaution to protect the children and the workers, to prevent the children from leaving the church property without knowledge and proper consent, and in order to notify the parents of an emergency, a sign-in and sign-out sheet is required. Sheet will provide the time dropped off, time picked up, Parent or person dropping off and picking up child, and emergency phone number shall be kept and filed. This policy applies to babies in the nursery, to all toddlers, and all children under the age of 16.

### **Procedures for Off-Site Activities**

#### **Transportation Rules:**

1. Church-approved volunteers may provide transportation to and from activities held away from the church. Drivers must be a minimum of 25 years old. If there is only one vehicle, there must be two adults present. The non-driving second adult may be 18 years or older.
2. While transportation to and from activities held at the church is not the church's responsibility, under certain circumstances children or youth may be transported in the church bus. In such circumstances, parents will complete a HUMC registration form for each child riding the bus. Parents must also agree to meet their child at a designated drop-off time and place.
3. Youth-aged riders must have a Medical/Liability Release form on file with the Youth Committee. This form will serve as a permission slip for riding in any vehicle designated for church use. Forms must be notarized and will expire after two years. Hospital policy on medical waivers should be reviewed annually by a staff member.

#### **Sleeping Arrangements**

On church-sponsored overnight trips, motel-type room settings should be avoided whenever possible. Bunk-type housing is always the preference. If motel-type rooms must be used, adults should never share a room with youth or children. In bunk-type housing, at least 2 adults should be present in each room. Adults should always shower and change clothes in a private space when possible.

## **REPORTING OF INCIDENTS**

### **Reporting Accidents and Injuries**

Despite best efforts, accidents and injuries do occur. When an accident or injury occurs, workers should use their best judgment to tend to the child's (or youth's) needs. After a child is treated,

assuming the injury is minor, an “Incident Report” (Appendix A) should be completed by the appropriate staff member and turned into the Safe Sanctuary Committee.

### **Reporting Abuse/Neglect and Alleged Abuse/Neglect**

**Purpose: The purpose of this section is to ensure that any suspected incident of abuse is treated seriously and preserves the privacy of the child, youth, or vulnerable adult making the allegations and the alleged abuser.**

#### **Definitions:**

Physical Abuse: Injury to a child, youth, or vulnerable adult by a parent or caretaker, which results in bruises, welts, fractures, burns, cuts, or internal injuries.

Sexual Abuse: Sexual abuse with a child, youth, or vulnerable adult which includes direct physical contact or the sharing of sexually explicit media.

Child Neglect: The failure of a parent or caretaker to provide a child under age 18 with adequate supervision, food, clothing, housing, or medical care.

#### **Procedure**

All reports of suspected child abuse must be taken seriously. Whenever child abuse is suspected, reports must be made immediately to the Senior Pastor and/or the Safe Sanctuary Coordinator.

The Senior Pastor and/or the Safe Sanctuary Coordinator will follow the following Procedure:

1. The Senior Pastor and/or the Safe Sanctuary Coordinator will complete the “Report of Suspected/Alleged Incident of Child Abuse” form (Appendix B).
2. To assist in determining whether an incident qualifies as abuse, one may contact Child Help USA at 1-800-422-4453.
3. Contact the Department of Family and Child Services for Columbia County (DFACS) at 706-541-1640. If no answer call 911.
4. If the alleged abuse has taken place on the church grounds or the alleged abuser is a church member or staff, the Senior Pastor and/or the Safe Sanctuary Coordinator must notify the District Superintendent.
5. The Senior Pastor and/or Safe Sanctuary Coordinator must complete the entire Suspected Incident Checklist (pages 1-2 of Appendix B) and attach page 2 to page 1 of the “Report of Suspected/Alleged Incident of Child Abuse” outlining the suspected incident.
6. All records with respect to each event shall be kept confidential. However, records will be made available to all agencies and persons/parties with a right to know.
7. We recognize the sensitive nature of abuse and alleged abuse. To this effect, church members should refrain from discussing any information with anyone including the news media. The church, through the Trustees, will appoint a “Church Spokesperson” to address questions from the media.

#### **Exceptions Policy**

**Purpose: The purpose of this procedure is to outline the conditions and process which govern exceptions to the policies and procedures of the Safe Sanctuary Policy.**

#### **Eligibility**

Exceptions may be requested only for single-time, limited duration events. Ongoing programs may not request exceptions through this process, but should instead appeal to the

Review and Revision Requirements (named later in this report). Exceptions are valid only for a single occurrence of a given event. In case of recurring events, (e.g. annual youth trips) a new exception must be requested.

### **Exception Process**

Requests for exceptions must be submitted in writing to the Safe Sanctuary Coordinator and contain, but not limited to the following:

1. Name of the requestor
2. Work or Ministry Area
3. Name, duration, location, and purpose of event
4. Names of adults attending (for verification of approved volunteer status)
5. Expected number of children or youth participating in event.

### **Review and Revision Requirements**

**Purpose: The purpose of this requirement is to ensure that the Safe Sanctuary Program remains up to date with the current life of the church.**

The Safe Sanctuary Program will be reviewed at a minimum annually beginning from the acceptance of the program by the Church Council.

### **Safe Sanctuary Coordinator/Committee responsibilities include:**

1. Educating primary workers and employees about the policy.
2. Answering questions about the policy.
3. Ensuring compliance with the policy.
4. Granting exceptions to the policy, in appropriate circumstances.
5. Assisting, as needed, with investigations.
6. Reviewing and renewing policy annually or as needed.
7. Evaluating board function.