

University UMC Safe Sanctuary Policy

University UMC, Chapel Hill

Created July 2016, Updated April 2023

From North Carolina United Methodist Annual Conference Policy:

The General Conference of the United Methodist Church, in April 1996, adopted a resolution aimed at eliminating any potential for child sexual abuse in the church. The Social Principles of the United Methodist Church state that "...children must be protected from economic, physical and sexual exploitation and abuse." (para. 162C) 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, both large and small, urban and rural. The problem cuts across all economic, cultural and racial lines. It is real, and it appears to be increasing. Most annual conferences can cite specific incidents of child sexual abuse and exploitation in their churches. Virtually every congregation has among its members adult survivors of early sexual trauma. Such incidents are devastating to all who are involved: the child, the family, the local church and its leaders.

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 and adults grow safe and strong (From The Book of Resolutions of the United Methodist Church. P. 384-386)

In solidarity with other United Methodist congregations, University United Methodist Church in Chapel Hill has adopted relevant components of this policy for the prevention of abuse of vulnerable people in our church.

Purpose: Our purpose for establishing this Safe Sanctuary Policy and Procedures is to establish our commitment to the physical, emotional and spiritual safety of our children, youth and vulnerable adults we minister to at University UMC.

Covenant Statement: University United Methodist Church hereby pledges to conduct the ministry of Jesus Christ in ways that assure the physical and emotional safety and spiritual growth of all of our children, youth, and vulnerable adults as well as those who work with them. We will follow reasonable safety measures when selecting and recruiting workers; we will implement appropriate operational procedures in all areas of programming and care; we will train our workers on our procedures and policies; and we will have a clearly defined procedure for reporting a suspected incident of abuse consistent with North Carolina law. 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 and youth 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).

I. Staff/Volunteer Recruitment and Selection Guidelines

A. Age

Volunteers and paid staff working with children and youth in any position of authority, must be at least 5 years older than the age of the persons they are working to serve. This standard allows persons to be separated by enough years to develop a clearer perspective of and be recognized as an authority figure by the group they are serving. If these persons are not yet 21 years of age (and 5 years older than the oldest they are serving), they may not serve in a role of authority; however, they may be utilized as assistants to those in leadership positions. In the case of Youth Ministry, all volunteers/paid staff must be at least two years removed from University UMC Youth Group while abiding by the above guidelines (working only with those 5 years younger than them as an assistant).

B. Six Month Guideline

All volunteers who work with children, youth, or vulnerable adults at University UMC must have been a member *or* regularly attending constituent of our church for at least six months. This time of interaction between ministry leaders and the applicant allows leaders to better evaluate the suitability of an applicant for work. In the case of UNC Wesley Campus Ministry college students, program leaders may waive this rule and instead take additional steps to screen the applicant such as securing references from the pastor of Wesley Campus Ministry and/or from the pastor, youth director or other representative of the volunteer's home church. Volunteers for whom the six-month guideline has been waived are considered probationary for six months. In the case of paid staff workers, program leaders will take additional steps to screen applicants who have not been a member of another United Methodist Church at least six months prior to employment.

C. Application

Applicants must complete and sign an application and the related waivers giving permission to check references and background information.

D. Reference Checks

Church leaders will check at least one reference for each primary worker. The references will be done by phone, mail, or in person. For applicants for compensated positions, additional former supervisors may be checked.

E. Background Checks

Criminal background checks shall be made of all clergy and paid staff, and to those volunteers who work with children, youth, or vulnerable adults to the extent permitted by law, prior to employment, to determine current or historic child abuse or sexual misconduct, criminal records, violent or pedophilic behavior.

- **Prior Convictions:** Individuals who have been convicted of physical or sexual abuse or neglect **may not** work in any church-sponsored activity or program for children, youth or vulnerable adults.

G. Interview

All applicants must be interviewed for suitability for the work they desire to do. Interviews will be conducted by the leader of the program in which the applicant will work, or by other persons designated by the program leader. Church policy and guidelines will be discussed during the interview. All staff and volunteers must complete Safe Sanctuary Training before working with children, youth or vulnerable adults.

I. Confidentiality of Information

The church will keep confidential all information received in the applicant selection process. Selection information will be marked as such and stored in a safe location with limited access afforded only to church staff and others with a need to know. The Minister of Administration, Director of Children and Family Ministries, Director of Youth Ministries, and the staff person charged with recruiting volunteers for the care of vulnerable adults, alongside the Staff Parish Relations Committee are responsible for the implementation of these policies as well as the maintenance of confidential records.

J. Required Forms and Signatures

In addition to staff application and reference forms, all applicants will sign “Authorization and Request for Criminal Background Check” and “Participation Covenant Statement” forms as part of the application process.

II Staff/Volunteer Supervision Guidelines

All meetings of children, youth, and/or vulnerable adults affiliated with University United Methodist Church will be governed by the following guidelines. Note there are specific guidelines for individual counseling and overnight events (see E & G):

A. Two-Adult Rule

Two approved adults must be present at all times and these adults cannot be related or partnered. If they are, then a third adult must be present. This applies to classroom activities, activities away from the church facility and when transporting children, youth and vulnerable adults. Whenever possible, teachers will be assigned in teams of two or more per Sunday School hour to every class of children or youth. Concerted effort will be made to recruit sufficient numbers of volunteer teachers/leaders to permit such team teaching. Other church sponsored or community groups of children or youth who meet at the church should have two or more leaders present whenever possible. When feasible, both male and female leaders would be present, especially in a co-ed group.

B. Open Door Policy

Further protection for the children requires that an open door policy be followed. This policy shall state that the parents of the children served, the clergy, administrative and professional staff of the church

have the right to visit and observe the children's/youth activity, classroom, or church-sponsored program at any time, unannounced.

C. Communication/Access by Phone

There must be access to the leaders of a group by cell phone when groups are at or away from the church facility. The church office or authorized church representative will be given this number prior to their departure from church property.

D. Doors and Windows

All classroom and office doors will have a window or visibility from hallway or remain open while occupied.

Windows will be kept free from adornment.

E. Individual Counseling

One-on-one counseling interactions are necessary and appropriate, but care must be taken that they be conducted in an environment that provides visibility by other adults. In all cases, another adult is to have knowledge of staff members' whereabouts and with whom they are meeting. Children and youth receiving individual counseling should be told they are free to discuss any aspects of the counseling process with a parent or other adult, especially if they are uncomfortable about anything that occurs in counseling. They need also be told that staff members and volunteers are mandated reporters and that all incidents of suspected abuse and neglect revealed during the session will be reported in accordance with section IV of this policy.

F. Touch

Physical touch can be appropriate to the age of the child, youth or vulnerable adult. Touching should be initiated by the child, youth, or vulnerable adult. If it is not, permission should be asked by the staff or volunteer (for instance, if someone is caring for a vulnerable adult at the end of life, she could ask if it's okay to hold the parishioner's hand at the bedside). It should be a response to the person's need for comforting, encouragement, or affection. It should *never* be based upon the volunteer/staff's needs. Ideally, touching and affection should only be given when in the presence of other ministry workers. It is much less likely that touch will be inappropriate or misconstrued as such when two adult workers are present and the touching is open to observation. This is especially important when diapering a baby or helping a young child or vulnerable adult change clothes or use the restroom.

Touching behavior should not give even the appearance of wrongdoing. As ministry workers, behavior must foster trust at all times; it should be above reproach. A person's preference not to be touched should be respected. Affection should not be forced upon a reluctant child, youth, or vulnerable adult. Church workers are responsible to protect those under their supervision from inappropriate touching by others. Church workers must promptly discuss inappropriate touching or other questionable behavior by other workers with their ministry leader, staff member, or a pastor.

Inappropriate forms of touch include, but are not limited to:

- Children older than preschool age sitting on laps of adults. If they are preschool age or below, they must be sitting on a lap in the presence of at least one other adult and a group of children (in other words, lap-sitting alone in a room is inappropriate).
- Piggy back rides
- Massages (if there is a massage circle, it is *only* appropriate for adults to participate if there are at least 5 people in the circle and at least 2 other adults present)
- Touching out of anger or disgust
- Touching in any manner that may be construed as sexually suggestive
- Touching private/intimate areas of the body and genital areas
- Any physical touch that will cause harm

Appropriate forms of Touch Include:

- A side hug. If the hug is from the front, it needs to be very brief (less than 3 seconds)
- Holding hands while praying
- Holding hands while walking if it is with a young child or vulnerable adult who needs help walking
- A brief, assuring pat on the upper back or shoulder
- Handshakes, high fives, or fist bumps

G. LGBTQ Youth.

Being inclusive yet protecting of all children and youth is difficult to navigate. It is a process that is constantly changing and evolving. Currently, there are a few important considerations, which University United Methodist Church will seek to uphold:

- Make no assumptions about a young person's sexual orientation or gender identity.
- Stay educated on proper use of terminology.
- Be intentional about creating and maintaining a safe environment and culture of awareness around derogatory language and bullying.

There is not a specific housing policy for transgender or gender non-conforming youth. It is vitally important for the staff ministry leader in charge to openly communicate with the individual youth about their needs. Some reasonable flexibility may be necessary to ensure comfortable accommodation that best suits everyone, and is at the discretion of the youth, family, and leaders.

H. Overnights or Outings Away from Church Property

If a group stays overnight at the church, or if a church-sponsored group leaves the premises, two or more leaders must be present and must include at least one male and female if the group is mixed gender. All children and youth participating in out-of-town and overnight outings must have written consent and a notarized medical release form. (Medical release and consent forms may be completed for a one-year period and *must* be renewed annually). In no circumstance is one adult (other than the parent) to take a child or children on an overnight outing alone.

Chaperone responsibilities include the following and enforcing these rules:

- On overnight outings, there will be a 1:7 adult: child/youth ratio observed
- If the trip is local (within 25 miles of the church), chaperones do not need to include parents
- If the trip is not local (outside 25 miles from the church) chaperones must include parents whose children/youth are attending the trip.
- For longer trips (150 miles or more) each vehicle must have 2 licensed chaperones. Youth will not be transported by other youth. Minimum age for drivers is 21 unless defined through a rental company policy agreement.
- At least one chaperone trained in CPR/First Aid is required on overnight events.
- Adults and students will be split by gender for overnight accommodations. We will work to make accommodations for transgender individuals or gender non-conforming individuals.
- When large common sleeping areas are used, adults will remain in the immediate vicinity, sleeping near the exits.
- Chaperone couples will not stay in the same bed/sleeping bag, even same sex couples who are sleeping in the same room.
- With the exception of a parent/child combination, a staff and youth or two (or more) youth will not occupy the same bed or sleeping bag.
- It is not permitted for same-sex youth couples to sleep in the same cabin if there are more than one sleeping space designated for that gender.
- A youth and an adult or more than one youth should never be alone in a sleeping quarter for an extended period of time while the rest of the group is outside participating in activities.
- Youth should always be accompanied by another youth and should never go anywhere alone.
- No youth is permitted to sleep alone in a room with an adult other than his/her own parent.
- Inappropriate use of cameras, imaging, or digital devices is prohibited.
- Appropriate attire is required for all activities (This must be determined based on the nature of the trip. For instance, no shorts are allowed on ASP, but would be allowed on other summer outings).

I. Gifts

Gift giving should be done on a group basis and for special occasions only. Gifts should be appropriate to the occasion.

J. Training

Prior to working with children/youth, all staff and volunteers must receive Safe Sanctuary Training. Such training must be renewed annually and a record of trained adults kept on file by the appropriate program directors. In addition, a summary of current child abuse statutes and reporting requirements for your legal jurisdiction are to be made available to all clergy, paid staff and volunteers who regularly supervise youth activities, Church Council members and all other church employees. These can be found here at <https://www.childwelfare.gov/pubPDFs/manda.pdf>. Laws specific to North Carolina begin on Page 40 of the PDF. Another site listed here: <https://www2.ncdhhs.gov/dss/cps/> and here specifically for Orange County: https://www2.ncdhhs.gov/dss/local/dir_oran.htm

Church employees who supervise young people must maintain current certification in basic first aid and basic CPR. The church will pay expenses for this training. New employees must get this certification within 90 days of the start of their employment. Nursery workers and others serving young children may also want training in infant and toddler CPR. Other workers are encouraged, but not required, to get training if they frequently accompany children or youth on such activities as: water sports, camping, home-building mission trips, etc. Outings away from church property will require at least one staff certified in CPR and First Aid.

K. Verification of Reading of Policy Statement

Upon receipt of this policy statement, the volunteer or paid staff person will read and sign our covenant that says he/she has read University United Methodist Church's Safe Sanctuary Policy.

III. Response by Church Workers to Allegations of Abuse

As Christians, we are committed to protecting and advocating for children/youth/vulnerable adults participating in the life of the church. The church is entrusted to provide an emotionally safe, spiritually grounded, and healthy environment for children, youth, and adults in which they are protected from abuse.

It is our legal and moral responsibility to report suspected abuse whenever it comes to our attention regardless of where that abuse takes place. We shall report suspected abuse to stop potentially existing abuse and to prevent further abuse. To report abuse is to witness to the world of the love and justice of God. Reporting abuse is a form of ministering to the needs of those crying out for help. If abuse occurs, it is our intention to act as an advocate for all affected persons, providing support, information, assistance and intervention.

We strive to provide a supportive atmosphere, offering both objectivity and empathy as we seek to create a climate in which healing can take place. If abuse is suspected by, observed by or disclosed to a volunteer and/or paid staff member of the church, that person shall report the incident immediately.

A. How to Report Disclosed, Suspected or Observed Abuse:

1. Tell the person in charge at the time who should be a paid staff person at University UMC unless the accused is this person, in which case their supervisor needs to be notified.
2. Ensure the protection of and tend to the immediate needs of the child, as the situation requires.
3. Along with the Staff in charge, contact the Orange County Department of Social Services to make the report. Write down notes as necessary to not forget important details.

Orange County Department of Social Services

Website: http://orangecountync.gov/departments/social_services/index.php

113 Mayo St., Hillsborough, NC 27278

Mailing Address: PO Box 8181, Hillsborough, NC 27278

State Courier#:17-50-11

(919) 245-2800 / Fax: (919) 644-3005

CPS Intake: (919) 245-2818
Child Protective Services Fax (919) 643-3039
County Population: 119,894
Emergency Phone: (919) 732-8181

4. Contact the senior pastor or pastor on call. If the pastor is the accused party, the designee will notify the chair of the Staff Parish Relations Committee and the District Superintendent.
5. Create and give written documentation to the relevant staff person (e.g. if the alleged abused party is a child, give the documentation to the Director of Children and Family Ministries), pastor and/or Chair of the Staff Parish Committee.
6. After having reported the suspected abuse to the proper authorities, the incident is to be reported to the lead pastor (unless they are the perpetrator), the church's insurance company, and the district superintendent. The district superintendent will report the allegation to the bishop's office. Do not try to handle this without professional assistance. If the accused is a clergy (deacon or elder) member of an annual conference, local pastor, or diaconal minister, provisions of Paragraph 359 and Paragraph 2702 of The 2000 Book of Discipline of the United Methodist Church must be followed.
7. A list of emergency numbers will be available to the staff at all times.
8. If the accused is working in a volunteer or paid position with children or youth in the church, immediately, yet with dignity and respect for the sacred worth of the person, remove the accused from further involvement with children and/or youth.

B. Telling the Accused

Once the proper authorities have been contacted and the safety of the child or youth is secured, the designated person may tell the accused that a report has been made. If the accused is a volunteer or paid staff of the church, that person shall be relieved temporarily of his or her duties until the investigation is finished. If the accused is a paid staff person of the church, arrangements should be made to either maintain or suspend his or her income until the allegations are cleared or substantiated.

C. Media

Any contact with the media should be handled by a pre-determined spokesperson the Lead Pastor. Care will be taken to safeguard the privacy and confidentiality of all involved. The spokesperson should generally convey that the matter is under investigation and any comments made prior to the conclusion of the investigation would be premature.

D. Records

A written report of the basic information shall be kept to ensure on-going ministry to, and advocacy for, victims and others involved. A form for this purpose shall be available in the church office. The report shall be brief and contain only factual information relevant to the situation. It shall be filed in a secure place in order to ensure confidentiality. It shall be written in ink or typed to prevent it from being changed. The church must also file a copy of the report with the bishop's office of the North Carolina Conference where it shall remain confidential.

V. Social Media Guidelines

Adult Volunteers or Staff members may not request to “friend” or accept a “friend” request from a person under the age of 18 without written permission of the child’s parent or legal guardian. This applies to all social media platforms except Snapchat as communicating with a minor through Snapchat is **not permitted at all**. This form denies permission for the use of social media platforms that do not retain records of photographs. Ideally, the parent would sign a consent at the beginning of the program year that lasts that entire year. Adult volunteers and staff members will not communicate with children under the age of 13 on any forms of social media. If they must communicate by email with a middle school youth, then they need to always carbon copy the parent or legal guardian.

Communication between a minor and an adult on social media or texting should always be appropriate in nature to the point that when an objective third party reads texts or comments on photographs, etc. that he/she will easily discern an appropriate relationship between the two parties.

These guidelines of communication must still be followed (if communication continues) even after volunteering is completed and/or after employment at University UMC ceases and will remain in place until the youth is 18 years of age.

Photos published on sponsored sites should not include name or contact information for any persons under the age of 18. Parents who do not want their child’s picture published anywhere should write this and send it to both the relevant program director and communication specialist at University UMC. Ideally, the parent would sign a consent or opt-out (denial of consent) form at the beginning of the program year that lasts that entire year.

University UMC Abbreviated Safe Sanctuary Policy

Volunteers/Staff

- **Age:** Volunteers/Staff must be at least 5 years older than the persons they are working to serve. If they are not 21 years of age, they may not serve in a role of authority, but as assistants. In Youth Ministry, they must be 2 years removed from UUMC Youth Group.
- **Sixth Month Guideline:** Volunteers/Staff must be a member of our church for at least six months before volunteering with minors and vulnerable adults. If this must be waived for a probationary period, it will likely be for UNC Wesley college students and those paid staff who do not come from the Methodist denomination.
- **Background Check:** Criminal background checks shall be made of all clergy, paid staff, and volunteers who have supervisory program responsibility to the extent permitted by law to determine current or historic child abuse or sexual misconduct, criminal records, violent or pedophilic behavior. Background Checks are good for 3 years.
 - Prior Convictions: Those convicted of physical or sexual abuse or neglect **may not** work in any church-sponsored activity for children, youth or vulnerable adults.
- **Two Adult Rule:** Two approved adults must be present at all times and these adults cannot be related or partnered. If they are, then a third adult must be present.
 - This applies to classroom activities, activities away from the church facility and when transporting children, youth and vulnerable adults.
 - When feasible, both male and female leaders are there, especially in a co-ed group.
- **Touch:** Physical touch can be appropriate to the age of the child, youth or vulnerable adult. Touching should be initiated by the child, youth, or vulnerable adult. If it is not, permission must be asked. It should be a response to the person's need for comforting, affection, or safety. It should **never** be based upon the volunteer/staff's needs.
 - Inappropriate Forms of Touch Include, but are not limited to: Children older than preschool sitting on laps of staff/volunteers. If they are preschool age or below, they must be sitting on a lap in the presence of at least one other adult and a group of children (in other words, lap-sitting alone in a room is inappropriate); Piggy back rides; Massages (if there is a massage circle, it is *only* appropriate for adults to join if there are at least 5 people and at least 2 other adults participating); Touching out of anger or disgust; Touching in any manner that may be construed as sexual; Touching private/intimate areas of the body and genital areas; Any physical touch causing harm
 - Appropriate Forms of Touch Include: A side hug. If the hug is from the front, it needs to be brief (less than 3 seconds); Holding hands while praying; Holding hands while walking if a young child or vulnerable adult needs help; A brief pat on the upper back or shoulder; Handshakes, high fives, or fist bumps
- **How to Report Disclosed, Suspected or Observed Abuse:**
 - Immediately notify the staff person in charge
 - See our full Safe Sanctuary Policy for a step-by-step response protocol

LGBTQ Youth

Being inclusive yet protecting of all children and youth is difficult to navigate. It is a process that is constantly changing and evolving. Currently, there are a few important considerations, which University United Methodist Church will seek to uphold:

- Make no assumptions about a young person's sexual orientation or gender identity.
- Stay educated on proper use of terminology.
- Be intentional about creating and maintaining a safe environment and culture of awareness around derogatory language and bullying.

There is not a specific housing policy for transgender or gender non-conforming youth. It is vitally important for the staff ministry leader in charge to openly communicate with the individual youth about their needs. Some reasonable flexibility may be necessary to ensure comfortable accommodation that best suits everyone, and is at the discretion of the youth, family, and leaders.

Chaperones for Overnight Events

- **Overnighters or Outings Away from Church Property:** Two or more leaders must be present and must include at least one male and female if the group is mixed gender. All minors on an overnight outing must have written consent & notarized medical release form.
- Chaperone responsibilities include the following and enforcing these rules:
 - There will be a 1:7 adult: child/youth ratio observed
 - If the trip isn't local (outside 25 miles) chaperones include parents of minors attending
 - For longer trips (150 miles or more) each vehicle must have 2 licensed chaperones
 - Minimum age for drivers is 21 unless defined through a rental company
 - At least one chaperone trained in CPR/First Aid is required.
 - Adults and students will be split by gender for overnight accommodations. We will work to make accommodations for transgender individuals or gender non-conforming individuals.
 - When large common sleeping areas are used, adults will remain in the immediate vicinity, sleeping near the exits.
 - Chaperone couples will not stay in the same bed/sleeping bag, even same sex couples who are sleeping in the same room
 - With the exception of a parent/child combination, a staff and youth or two (or more) youth will not occupy the same bed or sleeping bag
 - It is not permitted for same-sex youth couples to sleep in the same cabin if there are more than one sleeping space designated for that gender
 - A youth and an adult or more than one youth should never be alone in a sleeping quarter while the rest of the group is outside
 - Youth should always be accompanied by another youth
 - No single youth is permitted to sleep in a room with an adult other than his/her parent
 - Inappropriate use of cameras, imaging, or digital devices is prohibited
 - Appropriate attire is required for all activities, based on the nature of the trip

Social Media & Direct Communication

- Adult Volunteers/Staff members may **not** request to “friend” or “follow” or accept a “friend” request from a person under the age of 18 without written permission of the child’s parent or legal guardian. This applies to all social media platforms **except** Snapchat as communicating with a minor through Snapchat is **not permitted at all**. This form denies permission for the use of social media platforms that do not retain records of photographs.
- Adult volunteers and staff members will **not** communicate with children under the age of 13 on any forms of social media. If they must communicate by email with a middle school youth, then they need to always carbon copy the parent or legal guardian.
- Communication between a minor and an adult on social media or texting should always be appropriate in nature to the point that when an objective third party reads texts or comments on photographs, etc. that he/she will easily discern an appropriate relationship between the two parties. These guidelines of communication must still be followed (if communication continues) even after volunteering is completed and/or after employment at University UMC ceases and will remain in place until the youth is 18 years of age.
- Photos published on sponsored sites should not include name or contact information for any persons under the age of 18. Parents who **do not** want their child’s picture published anywhere should notify both the relevant program director and communication specialist.

Please sign, detach, and return to relevant Program Director

By signing my name below, I certify that I have read and understand the above information. Any questions concerning this Safe Sanctuary Policy have been discussed. My signature also certifies my agreement with this policy and I plan to adhere to it both while I am serving at University UMC Chapel Hill and at any point after I may no longer serve at University UMC until the youth I am in communication with has turned 18 years of age.

Print Name: _____

Signature: _____

Date: _____

Child/Youth Name (If applicable): _____

By Checking this box, I am requesting that or my child’s/youth’s photograph **not** be published on any published platform used by University UMC (including news articles, website, Facebook, Constant Contact emails, etc.) even though name and contact information is never included with a published photograph.