

SAFE SANCTUARY POLICY
Community United Methodist Church
(Revised September 2015, Approved November 2015)

OUR MANDATE

God calls us to make our churches safe places, protecting children and youth from sexual and ritual abuse. God calls us to make our churches communities of faith where children and adults alike can grow strong and remain safe. As Jesus said, “Whoever welcomes a child...welcomes me.” In April 1996, the General Conference of The United Methodist Church adopted a resolution aimed at reducing the risk of child sexual abuse in the church. It is in response to this resolution that Community United Methodist Church developed and implemented this Safe Sanctuary Policy.

Community United Methodist Church is committed to providing a safe and secure environment for all children, youth, and volunteers who participate in ministries and activities sponsored by the church. We consider our children and youth to be our most precious gifts. Our congregation is committed to preserving this church as a holy place of safety and welcome for all who would enter, and as a place in which all people can experience the love of God through relationships with others.

OUR POLICY

This policy applies to *all* paid staff and *all* volunteers engaged in the supervision and care of children and youth on CUMC church property or at church sponsored events held off-site.

A Safe Sanctuary Task Force is charged with implementing, maintaining, and monitoring the Safe Sanctuary policy and procedures for CUMC’s paid staff and volunteers. This task force will be called together annually by the SPRC Chair and the staff member overseeing children and youth ministries, and will ideally include the following persons: the Appointed Pastor, a Member of the Staff Parish Committee, a Member of the Board of Trustees, a Lay Leader, the Director of Children, Youth and Family Ministries, and representative parent(s) of children and/or youth.

According to the guidelines of the Baltimore-Washington Conference, the task force will conduct a yearly review of CUMC’s Safe Sanctuary policy and make changes as needed. CUMC will certify annually at Charge Conference that we developed, implemented, and continue to maintain a Safe Sanctuary policy. In addition, CUMC will hold an annual training and orientation covering the guidelines regarding the Safe Sanctuary policy at CUMC.

I. DEFINITIONS

A. Children: any individual infant to 5th grade.

B. Youth: any individual 6th—12th grade (under the age of eighteen).

C. Adult: any individual at least eighteen years of age.

D. Staff: any individual who is paid by the church (whether full- or part-time) and who has contact with children and youth.

E. Volunteer: any adult— a volunteer or paid person—who has been given the responsibility of ministering to and caring for children and/or youth. We recognize three tiers of volunteers:

- **1. Regular Volunteer:** any adult who volunteers with children and/or youth at CUMC on three or more occasions in an academic year (August to July), on overnight trips, or at any other events at the discretion of the church Staff (e.g., Sunday School teacher or assistant, VBS Volunteer, chaperone at a Youth Retreat or Mission Trip.)
- **2. Guest Volunteer:** any adult who volunteers with children and/or youth at CUMC two or fewer times in an academic year.
- **3. Youth Volunteer:** any individual at least ten years old or older, but under the age of eighteen, who has been enlisted to assist with the care of children. Youth Volunteers may not be in a primary role of responsibility for the supervision of children. Youth Volunteers may be invited to serve only after the Two Adult Rule has been satisfied (See Section III. A.)

II. GUIDELINES FOR RECRUITING, SCREENING, AND HIRING WORKERS

A. Confidentiality of Information

The chairperson of the Staff Parish Relations Committee (SPRC) will make arrangements to store securely all confidential Safe Sanctuary Volunteer Disclosure Forms, records from the background checks and any other paperwork relevant to our Safe Sanctuary screening process. The only persons who shall have access to these files will be the Pastor, any Staff related to Children and Youth Ministries, the paid Administrative Assistant, and the SPRC chair. Identifying information such as Social Security Numbers and Driver's License Numbers will be blacked out after the application process has been completed.

B. Required Forms and Background Checks

Staff: All applicants for paid staff of CUMC will complete the following forms and return them to the Staff Parish Relations Committee before employment: (a) a job application, (b) an authorization for Criminal Records Check, (c) an annual Safe Sanctuary Volunteer Disclosure Form with three references, and (d) a confidentiality agreement. Upon hiring, all paid staff will submit an annual Safe Sanctuary Disclosure Form and undergo a Criminal Records Check to be conducted once every five years by the SPRC.

Regular Volunteers: All regular volunteers will complete the following forms and return them to the Pastor or office staff before volunteering: (a) an annual Safe Sanctuary Volunteer Disclosure Form with three references and (b) an authorization for Criminal Records Check. Upon recruitment, all regular volunteers will submit an annual Safe Sanctuary Disclosure Form and undergo a Criminal Records Check to be conducted once every five years.

Guest Volunteers: All guest volunteers will complete and return to the Pastor or Church Staff a Safe Sanctuary Volunteer Disclosure Form with three references before volunteering with children or youth. Guest volunteers will not be required to undergo a background check unless they become a regular volunteer or at the discretion of the Church Staff. Guest Volunteers may not assume primary responsibility of the supervision of CUMC's children and/or youth and will be paired with at least one Volunteer who has undergone Safe Sanctuary training and a criminal background check.

Youth Volunteers: All youth volunteers (ages 10 and older) will complete and sign an annual Safe Sanctuary Volunteer Disclosure Form with three references. The Safe Sanctuary Volunteer Disclosure Form must also be signed by a parent or guardian.

If any "flags" appear as a result of the background check or any reference interview, all references will be checked and interviewed in more detail. After all interviews have been completed, a determination will be made by the Director of Children and Youth in consultation with the Pastor as to the appropriate course of action.

C. Reference Checks

Staff: The SPRC will conduct reference checks for all members of Staff and applicants for paid Staff positions.

All Volunteers: All Volunteers—Regular, Guest, and Youth—will be required to submit the names, address, phone number and email address of three adults to serve as character references. Church Staff will contact references for all first time Volunteers. For returning Volunteers, references will be checked periodically and as any issues or concerns arise.

If any "flags" appear as a result of the any reference interview, all references will be checked and interviewed in more detail. After all interviews have been completed, a determination will be made by the SPRC, Pastor, or Children & Youth Ministries Staff as to the appropriate course of action. The Pastor, Church Staff, and SPRC reserve the right to deny any person for a Volunteer position.

D. Five Year Older Rule

Any Staff or Volunteer must be at least five years older than the oldest child and/or youth involved in the program, event or activity to count toward the Two Adult Rule (see section III A). Volunteers fewer than five years older than the oldest child and/or youth may be invited to serve only after the Two Adult Rule has been satisfied. Adult Volunteers fewer than five years older than the oldest child and/or youth will still be subject to the screening policies for Regular and/or Guest Volunteers. Every effort will be made to ensure that youth volunteers work with children at least five years younger.

E. Six Month Rule

Adult volunteers assuming a primary role of leadership and responsibility in children's or youth activities shall have been active participants of the congregation for at least six months immediately prior to beginning a Volunteer assignment. This rule may only be waived at the discretion of the Pastor or Church Staff, with appropriate reference checks.

F. Safe Sanctuary Training

Community United Methodist Church will hold annual training and orientation events for new Staff, Regular Volunteers, and Youth Volunteers covering the guidelines regarding the Safe Sanctuary policy at CUMC. **All Staff, Regular Volunteers and Youth Volunteers will be required to attend this training one time.** Church Staff and Volunteer Ministry Leaders will hold ongoing training conversations within their respective ministries throughout the year, to ensure that every volunteer receives refresher trainings at least once per year. The format and content of the annual trainings will be determined by Church Staff or a designated Volunteer Ministry Leader.

III. GUIDELINES FOR SAFE MINISTRY WITH CHILDREN AND YOUTH

A. Two Adult Rule

Adult Volunteers shall observe the "Two Adult Rule" at all times so that no adult is ever alone with children or youth. At least two adults must be present at any church-sponsored event or ministry involving children or youth. No exceptions. This is for the safety of the volunteers as well as the children and youth.

B. Outings Away From Church Property

All children and youth participating in church-led activities off church property must have written consent from a parent or guardian.

C. Overnight Trips

All adult volunteers shall observe the following policies for overnight stay with children and/or youth, and activities which are sponsored and/or supervised by CUMC (This includes, but is not limited to, camping, lock-ins, and overnight stays in a personal dwelling):

- All children and youth participating in overnight church-led activities must have written parental/guardian consent and a medical release form. (Medical release forms may be completed for a one-year period and must be renewed annually.)
- The Two Adult Rule shall be followed at all times on overnight trips and in sleeping arrangements.
- Male and female adult leaders must be present for all overnight trips and outings including both male and female children or youth.
- No one is permitted to sleep with a person of the opposite sex or an adult other than his or her own spouse, parent, or guardian.

D. Worker to Child Ratios

Community United Methodist Church has a goal of maintaining the following ratios of ministry workers to children. In all cases, the Two Adult Rule is the minimum requirement. While the church recognizes that in some circumstances achieving these ratios may not be feasible (such as an unexpected number of children showing up for an event) every effort will be made to provide adult supervision according to these ratios. No children (ages infant – 5th grade), however, shall be left in a room without adult supervision. **Ratio for Children:** One Adult per every Five Children. **Ratio for Youth:** One Adult per every Eight Youth.

E. Doors and Windows

All classroom and office doors shall have a window for visibility from the hallway or remain open while occupied. Windows shall be kept free from decoration that would obstruct clear view into the room.

F. Restroom Assistance

If a Volunteer has to accompany a child to the restroom, the restroom door must be left open. It is acceptable for the Volunteer to leave the classroom for a brief time as long as there is a second screened Volunteer remaining in the classroom. Youth Volunteers may not accompany children to the restroom.

G. Confidential Discussions

One-on-one interactions are sometimes necessary and appropriate but care must be taken that they be conducted in an environment that provides visibility by other adults. Another adult shall know where Staff/Volunteers are when they are meeting with a child or youth.

H. Electronic Communication and Social Media Policy

To help ensure that all communication on electronic and social media channels remains positive and safe, all Staff and Volunteers shall observe the following policies:

- Staff and Adult Volunteers shall obtain parental consent before texting, emailing, or communicating via social media with youth.
- Staff and Adult Volunteers should not submit “friend” or “follow” requests to children or youth. Youth may ask to be “friends” or to “follow,” and adults should discern the level of contact they want to maintain with youth prior to responding to these requests.
- If any communication via electronic means becomes alarming or inappropriate, the Staff and/or Adult Volunteers shall cease any further private conversation and bring the communication in question to the attention of the Pastor or staff member for Children and Youth Ministries for further investigation.

I. Addressing Known Offenders in the Congregation

Community United Methodist Church welcomes all people into its doors. Those who have been convicted of child abuse are welcome to participate in adult worship, adult Christian Education, and adult social events. However, any adult who has been convicted of child abuse (whether sexual, physical, or emotional abuse) may not work in any capacity with children or youth in any church-sponsored activity or ministry.

IV. GUIDELINES FOR CONGREGATIONAL RESPONSE TO ALLEGATIONS OF ABUSE

If/when an allegation of child abuse arises, CUMC will take the following steps:

1. Ensure the child is in a safe environment. The care and safety of the victim will be CUMC's primary concern.
2. Notify the Pastor or qualified Church Staff (e.g., Associate Pastor, Director of Youth Ministries, Director of Children's Ministries) **immediately**. Staff will communicate the incident to the appointed Pastor. The Pastor will notify Conference authorities in accordance with the Book of Discipline.
3. If applicable, remove the alleged abuser from any further involvement with youth or children. (The alleged abuser will be treated with dignity as the investigation continues.)
4. Notify the proper authorities – parents, law enforcement or Child Protective Services – immediately.
5. Notify the church's insurance agent and attorney.
6. Keep a written record of the steps taken by the church in response to the allegation.
7. Cooperate fully with any investigations that are conducted.
8. Be honest in communicating to the congregation the situation and what steps are being taken, while protecting all parties involved. Any communication will include a statement that assures the safety of all children and dispel any rumors that probably have taken place.
9. Offer any necessary psychological or financial support to any victim, both during an investigation as well as following the incident.

V. CONCLUSION

Our congregation's purpose in establishing the Safe Sanctuary Policy and all accompanying procedures is to demonstrate our absolute commitment to the safety of all children and youth. In all our ministries with children and youth, CUMC is committed to demonstrating the love of Jesus Christ so that each child will be "surrounded by steadfast love...established in the faith, and confirmed and strengthened in the way that leads to life eternal" ("Baptismal Covenant II," United Methodist Hymnal, p.44).

For more information, see the Frequently Asked Questions document on the Conference's website at <http://bwcumc.org/resources/safe-sanctuary-and-sexual-misconduct/>.