

SAFE SANCTUARIES

Mill Creek Parish United Methodist Church

7101 Horizon Terrace

Derwood, MD 20855

v. 2019

Table of Contents

1.0	Introduction	3
2.0	Position Statement and Applicability.....	3
2.1	Position Statement & Maryland Law	3
2.2	Applicability.....	4
2.3	Training Workers.....	4
3.0	Recruiting and Screening Children and Youth Workers.....	4
3.1	Basic Requirement	4
3.2	Background Investigations.....	5
3.2.1	Data Requirements	5
3.2.2	Background Information Review	5
3.2.3	Data Protection	6
4.0	Procedures for Ensuring Safe Sanctuaries for Children and Youth.....	6
4.1	Bathroom procedures	6
4.2	The “Two Adult” rule	7
4.3	The “Five Years Older” rule.....	7
4.4	The “No Leaders under Age Eighteen” rule	7
4.5	The “Open Door” rule	7
4.6	Applicability of Safe Sanctuaries to all Users of the Church Facilities	7
4.7	Nursery policies.....	8
4.8	Overnight stays	8
4.9	On-site and Off-site Youth Functions.....	8
4.10	Unexpected situations	9
5.0	Responding to Allegations of Abuse	9
5.2	In the event of an incident of suspected abuse the following actions must be taken:.....	9
5.2.1	Reporting.....	9
5.2.2	Faithful response to the alleged victim.....	10
5.2.3	Faithful response to the public through the media	10
6.0	Implementation and Forms.....	11
7.0	Additional Policies.....	11
7.1	Touching a child	11
7.2	Administering first aid to a child	11
7.3	Dealing with a disruptive child.....	11
7.4	Bullying.....	11

1.0 Introduction

Mill Creek Parish United Methodist Church (hereafter “the Church” or “MCP UMC”) does not tolerate abuse, neglect or sexual abuse of minors by anyone involved in Church work or events. Our overseeing body, the Baltimore-Washington Conference of the United Methodist Church, is committed to ensuring that all children and youth involved in local church or annual conference ministries may participate in an environment of safety and security. In that light, the Conference requires all local churches to develop and implement policies and procedures to protect the children and youth in their care. Therefore, Mill Creek Parish United Methodist Church (MCP UMC) establishes the policies and procedures described herein.

2.0 Position Statement and Applicability

2.1 Position Statement

Defined by Maryland law:

According to the Code of Maryland Regulations (“COMAR”), Section 07.02.07.02, defines child abuse and child neglect in the following manner:

- a. **Child abuse** means physical injury, not necessarily visible, of a child, under circumstances that indicate that the child’s health or welfare is harmed or at substantial risk of being harmed.
- b. **Child neglect** means the failure to give proper care and attention to a child including the leaving of a child unattended under circumstances that indicate that the child’s health or welfare is harmed or placed at substantial risk of harm.
- c. **Sexual abuse** means an act or acts involving sexual molestation or exploitation, whether physical injuries are sustained or not.
- d. **Mental injury** means the observable, identifiable, and substantial impairment of a child’s mental or psychological ability to function.

MCP UMC provides a safe and nurturing environment for all children and youth that utilize our facilities. MCP UMC does not tolerate any type of abuse, neglect, or harm of children or youth. In order to provide this positive environment, MCP UMC has procedures for:

- Recruiting, screening, and appointing/hiring staff and volunteers to work with children and youth
- Training our workers and volunteers
- Establishing procedures to assure Safe Sanctuaries, or a safe environment, for children and youth
- Responding to allegations of abuse
- Implementing this policy, including associated forms and administrative procedures

2.2 Applicability

This policy applies to all persons who work directly with children or youth in MCP UMC programs, including any and all activities hosted by the Church in our physical facilities (i.e. Sunday School, Church Preschool, Vacation Bible School, etc.) or otherwise held off-site, such as sponsored trips or activities (i.e. mission trips, community service events, etc.). The Safe Sanctuary Policy (“the Policy”) also applies to any and all activities or events conducted by outside groups at Church facilities.

An outside organization or person may sign the Participation Covenant and follow this Policy. Alternatively, the outside user may submit its own policy regarding the protection of children and youth to the MCP Pastor for approval, prior to the use of MCP UMC facilities. The submitted policies and procedures by the outside user must be consistent with those stated in this Policy, and must practice their policies when utilizing MCP UMC facilities. A copy of the outside user’s policy will be kept on file with the Church Office.

2.3 Training Workers

Any staff and volunteers who work with children and youth are required to be familiar with and trained in the procedures set forth in this Policy. Training opportunities will be provided annually at the beginning of the school year for volunteers and staff, and as needed otherwise to accommodate new personnel.

In addition to the training requirement, all volunteers and staff will be provided with an electronic and/or written copy of this Policy and shall be required to sign a Participation Covenant acknowledging and agreeing to its provisions before being permitted to work with children or youth. The written Safe Sanctuaries policy and any revisions will be distributed to all parents and guardians of children and youth involved in church programs each school year, and otherwise made available to the general congregation and the public by posting the Policy on the Church website.

3.0 Recruiting and Screening Children and Youth Workers

3.1 Basic Requirement

MCP UMC will ensure that all individuals who work with our children and youth are aware of each of these procedures and commits to adhere to them as they perform their duties. All participants and leaders will be required to sign a Participation Covenant.

MCP UMC will implement a thorough screening process for all paid and volunteer persons who work with children and youth. Any person leading an activity must have regularly attended MCP UMC for a 6-month period prior to becoming involved with children or youth. The Senior Pastor may waive this attendance requirement based on a recommendation from a pastor at a church previously attended.

3.2 Background Investigations

3.2.1 Data Requirements

MCP UMC performs background checks on each paid staff member and each volunteer who works with children and youth. Forms, data, and information obtained through this process will be kept by the Office Manager in accordance with requirements of Section 3.2.3. The information will also be available to the Senior Pastor. To facilitate these checks, MCP UMC requires each person who works with children or youth to complete the following forms and provide all required information:

- Application
- Background Check Permission Form
- Baltimore-Washington Conference Sexual Misconduct Questionnaire
- Three personal references

MCP UMC will use a reputable company to do the following checks:

- National Criminal History Database Search, including a check of Sexual Offender Registries
- Social Security verification
- County criminal records search
- Driving record search (for individuals who will be driving children and youth)

Any paid staff member or volunteer who drives children or youth for MCP UMC programs, or who drives the church van, shall submit a valid driver's license number and date of birth to the Church Secretary (or photocopy of their license). For each such person, a Driving Record/History will be obtained every 3 years from a reputable company. This information will also be made available to the church's insurance company.

3.2.2 Background Information Review

The Trustees establishes that any person shall be disqualified from a position of service working with the children and youth for any convictions for sexual misconduct or abuse of any kind.

The SPPRC establishes that any person shall be disqualified from driving MCP children and youth, other than their own, for church activities, considering the previous five years of driving history if any of the following information is discovered:

- more than two moving violations noted on a driving record; OR
- one serious violation (including drug or alcohol violations, reckless driving, etc.); OR
- driver's license currently under suspension.

In the event any person involved, or volunteering to be involved, is determined to be unsuitable to hold a position of service to MCP UMC children's and youth programs:

- That person shall be immediately barred from any position of service involving MCP UMC children and youth;
- That person shall be provided an immediate report of that determination and the MCP UMC restriction on further service; and

- The MCP UMC pastor shall notify the leader of the church activity affected by this finding of the prohibition on the person's volunteer service.

Background information provided to MCP UMC by the firms contracted to provide such functions will be reviewed by the Senior Pastor against the established criteria to determine suitability of the person to hold a position of service in MCP children's and youth programs. The Sr. Pastor may consult with the Minister of Christian Discipleship and/or the Chairperson of the Trustees for further adjudication, as he/she deems appropriate.

The stipulated background checks will be conducted every 3 (three) years if the individual serves consecutive years. If the individual does not serve consecutive years, the background checks will be conducted after each break in service of more than one year. If a worker has reason to believe that they are now subject to any of the disqualification criteria, he/she shall immediately report the information to two people in Church leadership, at least one of which must be a Pastor.

The Application and the Baltimore-Washington Conference Sexual Misconduct Questionnaire must also be completed annually. These forms will be reviewed by the Office Manager and filed in the Church Office. Any questions/issues will be raised to the Senior Pastor.

3.2.3 Data Protection

MCP UMC relies on the integrity of the organization or organizations with which we contract to provide the investigation services. MCP UMC uses the information provided solely for the purpose of determining the suitability of individuals to hold positions of service within our children and youth programs. All information provided or obtained will be kept private and secured in locked storage to ensure the confidentiality of the process. Access to the results of the Background investigations or the information provided by applicants will be limited to those persons responsible for processing or evaluating the information as part of the Safe Sanctuaries policy, and stipulated above. Any person may review information regarding his or her own background investigation upon request.

Persons gathering forms and other information necessary to implement this Safe Sanctuary process shall assure the security of the personal identifying information (PII) contained in application forms and in reports received from any screening organization utilized to perform background checks. Information provided by staff and volunteers containing PII shall be destroyed by shredder immediately upon receiving background investigation reports.

4.0 Procedures for Ensuring Safe Sanctuaries for Children and Youth

MCP UMC Safe Sanctuaries policies and procedures are established to maintain a safe and caring environment in which to operate the ministries and programs for children and youth. MCP UMC will ensure that all persons who work with children and youth in our church are aware of these procedures and will commit to adhering to them as they perform their duties. Each participant and leader will be required to sign a Participation Covenant.

4.1 Bathroom procedures

- a. When children up to the First (1st) Grade need to use a restroom during church activities, they shall be escorted to the restroom door by an adult volunteer or staff member. If the child needs help in the bathroom with toileting skills, the child's parent or guardian shall be sought out if possible. If it is not possible to reach the child's parent/guardian in a timely manner then the parent/guardian must be advised as soon as possible after the fact.

4.2 The "Two Adult" rule

- a. There shall be at least two (2) adults in any room where there are children or youth. If two adults are not present, the door shall remain open.
- b. Two adults will always be assigned to any activity involving children and youth.
- c. On Sunday mornings, someone designated by MCP UMC staff will make random classroom checks.

4.3 The "Five Years Older" Rule

- a. Any person leading or chaperoning youth activities shall be at least 5 years older than the youth they are leading.

4.4 The Leaders of Ministry Activity Age Requirement

- a. Any person leading an activity for children or youth or who is put in a position of responsibility for children or youth shall be at least 18 years of age or five years older than the oldest student in the ministry activity (*i.e., if oldest youth in middle school is 13 leader must be 18. ie. If oldest student in high school is 18 the leader must be 23*).
- b. Assistants/aides may be less than 18 years of age, if at least one adult is present.

4.5 The "Open Door" Rule

- a. All offices and classrooms used for children and youth activities shall have doors with a window, permitting visibility into the room or office from the hallway. Windows into classrooms and offices shall not be covered for any reason.
- b. At any counseling session with children or youth, doors shall remain open for the entire session. Sessions shall be conducted when others are nearby, even if not within listening distance.
- c. One-on-one mentoring shall be done on church grounds, in public places, or in places where other people are present. Transportation to and conduct of these sessions shall be planned carefully to avoid the possibility of un-observed time between the minor and adult leader.
- d. If during any mentoring or counseling activity, the adult foresees the reasonable possibility that he/she is going to be alone in a room, vehicle or other place with a youth, the adult must obtain advance approval of the arrangements from the youth's parent or guardian.

4.6 Applicability of Safe Sanctuaries to all Users of the Church Facilities

- a. Outside users of the church facilities, including individuals, groups renting space, and groups using space at no charge, must conform to the MCP UMC Safe Sanctuaries policies in every respect. Outside users/groups may submit their own policy regarding the protection of children and youth to the MCP Pastor for approval, prior to the use of MCP UMC facilities. The submitted policies and procedures by the outside user must be consistent with those stated in this Policy, and must practice their policies when utilizing MCP UMC facilities. A copy of the outside user's policy will be kept on file with the Church Office. This requirement will be managed by the Office Manager with oversight from the Senior Pastor.

4.7 Nursery Policies (Sunday Morning Services)

- a. Children shall be signed into the nursery by the parent/guardian dropping off the child using a Check-In Form. The parent/guardian will also provide the name of the person who will be picking up the child. The person picking up the child will have to sign the child out.
- b. The Check-In Form shall include a space to say where the parent/guardian will be during the service, such as "sanctuary" or "classroom 5," for example.
- c. If possible, all diaper changes should be made by parents/guardians.

4.8 Overnight Stays

- a. In the event activities include overnight stays with youth, youth and adults shall sleep in different rooms. If adults are required to stay in the same room as youth, they shall be of the same sex as the youth they are accompanying, and two unrelated adults are required per room.
- b. The youth shall always be segregated by sex in their respective sleeping quarters.
- c. Parents/guardians shall be informed about sleeping arrangements through the permission forms. Security concerns need to be taken into consideration as well as Safe Sanctuaries requirements.

4.9 On-site and Off-site Youth Functions

- a. The provisions in this section apply to any MCP UMC children or youth function which is not a family function, during which parents and siblings are not expected to participate.
- b. Clergy or volunteer leaders shall establish a roster of all children and youth participating in the MCP youth activity.
- c. The roster shall be completed for all children and youth participating in the activity at MCP facilities, departing from the MCP UMC premises, or congregating elsewhere for an MCP-UMC sponsored event or activity.
- d. A general youth-activity roster may be established in advance and maintained for a period of time, and must be established specifically for each individual event.
- e. Individual permission slips may take the place of a roster.
- f. The roster shall include the name of the child, the responsible parents/guardians and their contact information covering the duration of the planned activity.

- g. Parents/guardians shall acknowledge their child's participation in the activity, either by initialing the roster or by providing separate signed permission slips to the clergy or volunteer leaders before the activity begins.
- h. Off-site activities requiring liability waiver forms for participation shall be signed and provided by parents or guardians prior to participation. All signed forms with parental contact information, or a list containing the same, should be scanned and/or emailed electronically to the chaperones for use in the event of an emergency.

4.10 Unexpected situations

- a. In any situation where this Policy cannot be followed, such as a situation where a youth will unexpectedly need a ride home from an adult worker in a car, parents shall be notified in advance. These situations should be avoided. If they cannot be avoided, written permission should be obtained in advance. If written permission cannot be obtained, every effort should be made to obtain verbal permission in advance.

5.0. Responding to Allegations of Abuse

Any adult member of MCP UMC, particularly anyone working with our children or youth, is responsible for knowing the proper protocol if a youth or child comes to them with a claim of physical or sexual abuse. The Safe Sanctuaries policy shall be made available to all church members. It shall be available online, and written copies shall be provided to any church member who requests it.

5.1 In the event of an incident of suspected abuse the following actions must be taken:

5.1.1 Reporting

- a. The suspected abuse shall be reported to the Senior Pastor and to the head of the Church Council. If either of these persons is suspected of involvement in the alleged abuse, the incident shall be reported to the other and also to the chairperson of the Trustees and/or Staff-Parish Relations Committee.
- b. The suspected abuse must be reported immediately, as soon as it becomes known, to the Montgomery County Police, and the Montgomery County Department of Health and Human Services' Child Protective Services office; phone number 240-777-4417.
- c. If there is any suspicion that a child is in immediate danger, the alleged abuse must be reported immediately to 911.
- d. Suspected abuse must be promptly reported to the person accused unless otherwise directed by law enforcement or, in the opinion of the Senior Pastor, place the alleged victim at risk of bodily injury or further abuse of any kind.
- e. Any person who is reported to have committed any alleged abuse in MCP UMC-related activities shall be barred from further duty and shall refrain from any unsupervised contact with Church youth or children until the Senior Pastor and the head of the Church Council have cleared them of any wrongdoing. If the alleged abuse involves either of these two individuals, the head of the

Trustees must also clear the accused of any wrongdoing before that person can resume his/her duties.

- f. The parents or guardians of the alleged victim and the accused, if a minor, shall be notified immediately of any allegations of abuse and the steps taken to address the allegation.
- g. The Senior Pastor and the Head of the Church Council (along with the head of the Trustees, if either of the former are allegedly involved in abuse) shall report the incident and a summary of MCP UMC's response to the Church's insurance agent.
- h. In the case of alleged abuse by clergy, the Baltimore-Washington Conference of the United Methodist Church procedures will be followed as dictated by the Book of Discipline.
- i. The Senior Pastor and the head of the Church Council shall together compose a brief statement to be read to the MCP UMC congregation at the next available opportunity. The statement shall explain briefly the allegation and the steps being taken to deal with it. The statement shall protect the identity of both the alleged victim and the alleged perpetrator. The identity of the alleged perpetrator must be protected until any legal charges are filed or other official actions (i.e., any appropriate personnel actions) take place.
- j. At every step, the allegation shall be handled prayerfully. It shall also be taken into account that any accused person shall be considered innocent until proven guilty. It will be remembered that any accused person is still a person of sacred worth and dignity.

5.2.2 Faithful response to the alleged victim

- a. The Senior Pastor and the head of the Church Council shall ensure that the alleged victim is offered loving support and as much privacy as possible. At every point, the alleged victim must be assured that he/she is a person of sacred worth. The person and family members shall be directed towards counseling services, whether through the Stephen Ministry, the Baltimore-Washington Conference of the UMC, or other locally available resources.
- b. Faithful response to the Baltimore-Washington Conference of the UMC
- c. The Senior Pastor and the head of the Church Council shall report to the annual conference, via our District Superintendent, any reports of alleged abuse along with a summary of MCP UMC's response to the alleged incident.

5.2.3 Faithful response to the public through the media

- a. If law enforcement officials make formal criminal charges against a person associated with MCP UMC, the Senior Pastor and the head of the Church Council shall designate a point person for the media. The point person shall be responsible for all responses to media requests for information. In general, no comments will be made to the media regarding an on-going investigation and media will be referred to the police on police-involved investigations. If it is deemed appropriate, in a specific case, the point person may also proactively contact the local media with a brief written explanation of what has occurred. The emphasis from the MCP UMC point person shall be on actions that MCP UMC has taken to rectify the situation, to protect our youth and children, and to support the alleged victim and the alleged perpetrator. Privacy of all parties will be protected as much as possible.

6.0 Implementation and Forms

The SPPRC, Trustees, the Senior Pastor and Minister of Christian Discipleship will continue to meet as needed to develop and revise the MCP UMC Safe Sanctuaries policy, procedures and forms.

The SPPRC, Trustees, the Senior Pastor and Minister of Christian Discipleship will continue to educate and train the wider MCP UMC community on Safe Sanctuaries policy.

Forms included in the MCP UMC Safe Sanctuaries Policy will be found in an addendum to this document, and will include:

- Volunteer Application
- Permission to Obtain a Background Check
- Baltimore-Washington Conference Child Abuse/Sexual Misconduct Questionnaire
- Participation Covenant for MCP UMC staff and volunteers
- Outside users' Participation Covenant

7.0 Additional Policies

7.1 Touching a child

When touching a child, touch only areas of the body that would not be covered by a (conservative) bathing suit.

7.2 Administering first aid to a child

When a child requires first aid, try to find someone who has received training to administer it.

As quickly as possible, look for trained help that may be available on-site, but spend as little time as possible doing so that the child's condition doesn't get worse.

Staff and volunteers are encouraged to take first aid training. For any situation for which you assess you are not qualified to help and trained help is unavailable immediately call 911.

7.3 Dealing with a disruptive child

When a child is disruptive beyond verbal control, first, get the nearest staff member or volunteer to supervise the rest of the group and then take the disruptive child to the nearest leader to discipline.

7.4 Bullying

Bullying in any and all forms is abuse. If bullying occurs, refer to section 5.0.