



## NEW MEXICO CONFERENCE OF THE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

### SAFE SANCTUARIES POLICY

**It is our calling and our mandate to ensure safe sanctuaries for God's people.**

*"I tell you the truth, unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. Therefore, whoever humbles himself like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. And whoever welcomes a little child like this in my name welcomes me. But if anyone causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, it would be better for him to have a large millstone hung around his neck and to be drowned in the depths of the sea." Matthew 18:3-6, NIV*

*He has told you, O mortal, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God? Micah 6:8*

***The following policy and procedures are not based on a lack of trust in clergy, laity, staff or volunteers but are intended to protect our children, youth, employees, volunteers, vulnerable adults and the whole church body.***

- ❖ This policy is to be used at conference and district events and ministries. This is the minimum standard of which must be met. If additional protections (i.e., cameras, additional adults, etc.) are available, the additional protections should be utilized in addition to this policy.
- ❖ This policy will not apply to local churches, as written. Local churches must develop and implement their own policy or update their current policy no later than November 30, 2022 – see section VI of this policy.
- ❖ This Safe Sanctuaries Policy is not to be considered legal advice or used in place of legal advice but can be used as an example or guide to aid local churches in developing a policy that is specific to their church or ministry.

**Definitions:** More definitions of abuse and neglect can be found at Child and Youth Families department at <https://cyfd.org/> .

**Abuse** means harm or threatened harm to the health and welfare of a child, youth, or vulnerable adult by any person responsible for the health and welfare of a child, youth, or a vulnerable adult that occurs through non-accidental physical or mental injury; sexual abuse, sexual exploitation, or mistreatment, sexual harassment, sexual contact, sexual molestation; disseminating, exhibiting, or displaying sexually explicit material.

**Adult** means any person at least 18 years of age.

**Appropriate** means conduct that one would assume would be acceptable and permissible by a child's parent or guardian.

**Child, Children or Youth** refer to a person under 18 years of age.

**Leader** means anyone personally responsible for supervising and overseeing the specific Church related function, event or activity.

**Parent or guardian** means any parent, stepparent, foster parent, grandparent or appointed guardian with the general responsibility for the health, education, or welfare of a child or vulnerable adult.

**Sexual abuse** means engaging in any sexual contact, sexual penetration, sexual exploitation, sexual harassment, of a vulnerable adult, child or youth; or the dissemination, exhibiting, or displaying of sexually explicit material to an adult with special needs or child or youth, regardless of whether such conduct is with or without the knowledge or consent of the adult with special needs, or child or youth. This abuse may be violent or nonviolent. It includes any conduct that involves vulnerable adults, or children in sexual behavior for which they are not personally, socially, emotionally or developmentally ready.

**Sexual contact** means the intentional touching of the intimate parts or the clothing covering the immediate area of intimate parts of a youth, child or vulnerable adult.

**Sexual exploitation** means allowing, permitting or encouraging a vulnerable adult, child or youth to engage in prostitution or in the photographing, filming, creating electronic or computer-generated images or other forms of depicting a child, youth or vulnerable adult engaged in actual or suggestive sexual conduct.

**Sexual harassment** means any sexual advance or demand, either verbal or physical, which is perceived by the recipient as demeaning, intimidating or coercive.

**Staff** means any employee of the Conference, District or ministry, volunteer or paid.

**Volunteer** means a person who participates as a leader or assists a leader in activities relating to any conference and/or district event or ministry without compensation.

**Vulnerable adult** means an adult who has one or more mental, physical or emotional impairments that render the person incapable of self-care and/or independent living without help.

## Statement of Policy

- A. Abuse of a child, youth, vulnerable adult, and/or staff is prohibited in any conference, district, or local church event, ministries or use of building.
  - B. A member of staff or a volunteer for any conference and/or district event or ministry who observes or suspects that abuse has occurred concerning a child, youth, or vulnerable adult must immediately (within 24 hours) report such observed or suspected abuse to the appropriate legal state and/or federal authorities.
    - New Mexico- 855/333-7233
    - Texas- 800/799-7233
    - Federal-800/458-9858
  - C. Such reports of observed or suspected abuse must be reported to the Conference Provost, the District Superintendent, and Conference Safe Sanctuaries Director in writing.
    - In writing, with provided form and contact list.
      - Form link: <http://www.nmconfum.com/vital-congregations/safe-sanctuaries/>
      - Contact phone numbers/email addresses
        - Provost, Rev. Eduardo Rivera-505/255-8786, [erivera@nmconfum.com](mailto:erivera@nmconfum.com)
        - Director of Safe Sanctuaries, Melissa Thacker-505/255-8786, [melissa@nmconfum.com](mailto:melissa@nmconfum.com)
        - District Superintendent
          - Albuquerque- 505/255-8786  
[abqds@nmconfum.com](mailto:abqds@nmconfum.com)
          - El Paso-575/642-8559,  
[epds-Rowley@att.net](mailto:epds-Rowley@att.net)
          - Clovis-575/769-1755  
[erniev5876@gmail.com](mailto:erniev5876@gmail.com)
  - D. It is the responsibility of the event coordinator to ensure compliance with this policy.
- ❖ It is particularly important that all parties be sensitive to the alleged victim and his or her family as well as to the accused. Pastoral care should be available to all in the time of crisis.

## Implementation of Policy

I. Current background check screening and yearly training of all part-time and full-time staff, and volunteers, regardless of position, as all persons have the opportunity to work with or come in contact with children, youth and/or vulnerable adults.

- A. General: For the purposes of this policy, paragraph B and C, directly below, apply to all persons (volunteer or staff), especially those who work with children, youth, vulnerable adults and those who have direct contact with and supervision of children, youth and/or vulnerable adults. This does not include those persons who are employees of independent contractors who participate in events, such as bus drivers of contracted bus lines, bands and the like, although requesting written confirmation of completion is highly recommended.
- B. Background Investigations: ALL staff and volunteers must have a nationwide criminal background check done for them and kept on file. It is industry standard that background checks be completed at least every two (2) years. See D for information regarding Protect My Ministry's background checks.
- C. Training: Safe Sanctuaries Training is mandatory for ALL staff and volunteers. Training should be completed annually. Proof of completion should be kept by the church, as well as the trainee, and be available to the conference upon request. There are currently several ways to completed training. See D for information regarding offered training and certificates.
- D. The New Mexico Annual Conference is partnered with Protect My Ministry to provide background checks and fast online training at a discounted price. The discounted price is available to all churches in the New Mexico Annual Conference. Information regarding cost and what is included, as well as several links to helpful resources can be found on our conference website at <http://www.nmconfum.com/vital-congregations/safe-sanctuaries/> .

If your church has opted not to use Protect My Ministry, your church must have a program complying with the Safe Sanctuaries Policy of the New Mexico Annual Conference.

Our conference has a substantial number of CLM's and others that have taken a "train the trainer" course and can provide in person or online Safe Sanctuaries Training, with a signed certification of completion provided. Discipleship Ministries at <https://www.umcdiscipleship.org/> has a variety of Safe Sanctuary training information/videos that you may use. If you choose to do training that does not immediately give you a certificate of completion, please contact the Safe Sanctuaries Director at the NM Annual Conference.

## II. Responsible Non-Related, Adult Supervision

- A. It is the requirement of this policy that each local church of the New Mexico Conference and all sponsoring organizations of district and conference events shall provide adequate non-related adult supervision at district and conference events and ministries, attended by children, youth and/or vulnerable adults.
  - A minimum of two non-related adults be present at all conference and/or district events and ministries involving children or vulnerable adults.
- B. Age Difference: Except in the case of events involving vulnerable adults, a five-year difference in age of at least one of the on-site supervisors and the oldest supervised participant is required. Persons closer in age to those supervised may be acceptable in assisting the primary on-site supervisor(s).
- C. Day Care programs housed on church campus, privately run or church affiliated, will follow all guidelines for non-related Adult Supervision
- D. Teacher/child ratios:
  - Babies & Crawlers-1 adult to 3
  - Preschool (2yrs-5yr old's)-1 adult to 3
  - Elementary (1<sup>st</sup>-5<sup>th</sup> grades)-1 adult to 5
  - Middle school (6<sup>th</sup> – 8<sup>th</sup> grade)- 1 adult to 6
  - Youth (6<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup> grade)- 1 adult to 8

## III. Overnight Accommodations - events requiring overnight accommodations

- A. When staying in a camp or hotel setting, leaders shall sleep in separate rooms from children; or if necessary for children to share a room with a leader, leaders shall sleep in separate beds from children as long as any one leader is not alone with any one child.
- B. Recognizing accommodations may be restrictive in some cases, one leader is adequate, as long as any one leader shall NOT be alone with any one child.
- C. Coed overnight activities require both male and female adult leaders without exception.
  - Each gender must have separate rooms

## IV. Supervision for nursery/childcare at Conference and District events

- A. There shall be a minimum of two (2) non-related adult childcare providers per room.
- B. We recommend that whenever state childcare minimum standards shall be followed, particularly in relation to the number of childcare providers to child ratio,
- C. Teacher/child ratios:
  - Babies & Crawlers-1 adult to 3
  - Preschool (2yrs-5yr old's)-1 adult to 3
  - Elementary (1<sup>st</sup>-5<sup>th</sup> grades)-1 adult to 5
  - Middle school (6<sup>th</sup> – 8<sup>th</sup> grade)- 1 adult to 6
  - Youth (6<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup> grade)- 1 adult to 8

## V. **Supervision of children and youth at Conference and District events**

- A. Whenever reasonable, the "Two non-related Adult Rule" will require that no fewer than two non-related adults be present at all times during any church-sponsored program, event or ministry involving children or youth. Situations may arise when the "Two non-related Adult Rule" is not feasible. At NO time will an adult be one on one with a child in an isolated or closed situation.
- B. In an urgent situation, childcare and group activities will be relocated to a room near the main meeting area and doors will be left open.

## VI. **Local Church Mandate**

**Each local church is required to adopt a Safe Sanctuary and Active Threat policy for their church by November 30, 2022. Both policies be filed with District Superintendent, Provost and Conference Director of Safe Sanctuaries.** Annual review of both policies will be submitted at your annual Charge/Church Conference.

### A. **Local Church policy will meet the following minimum standards**

1. Educate the congregation on the definitions of abuse
2. Provide copy of Safe Sanctuaries Policy and Active Threat policy in written form to entire Congregation,
  - posted in easy to locate (e.g., Designated Notebook) areas in each room.
  - available on church website
3. Develop selection & screening criteria for church staff & volunteers that include background checks every 2 years for each person.
4. Implement the "Two Non-Related Adult" Rule
5. A Safe Sanctuaries **annual training** for all volunteers and paid staff
6. All events involving children must have at least two non-related adults in a supervisory role.
7. All internal windows uncovered in all rooms, doors open, and all areas in unobstructed view (hallways, shared areas, stairwells, playground, etc.)
8. A "sign-in/sign-out" procedure implemented for nursery, preschool, and elementary age children.
  - Signed in/out by parent or legal guardian.
9. Respond to allegations of abuse according to the state/federal law

**B. Other recommendations for inclusion in Local Church Policies**

1. Use open-door for any counseling session.
  - Know when to refer to counseling agency at any abuse outcry.
2. Provide advanced written documentation notice to parents for off campus activities, trips & retreats and provide proper supervision
3. Maintain and be familiar with adequate insurance for the scope of its ministries, e.g., transportation, camps, on site.
4. Maintain and update guidelines for church websites, and social media platforms.
5. Maintain and update transportation rules/guidelines,
  - two non-related adults in any transportation vehicle
6. Implement “Participation Covenant” for all participants and leaders.
7. Provide first aid/CPR trained personnel and always have available, with adequate equipment.
8. Provide parent and family Safe Sanctuaries training, annually.

**Upper Room/Discipleship Ministries Resources:**

- Participation Covenant
- Local Church Policy examples
- Safe Sanctuaries for Children and Youth – Book
- Safe Sanctuaries Training resource videos

**Addition information Contact persons through Discipleship Ministries:**

Scott Hughes  
 Executive Director, Congregational Vitality & Intentional Discipleship  
[shughes@umcdiscipleship.org](mailto:shughes@umcdiscipleship.org)  
 877/899-2780 ext. 7020  
 615/340-7020

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 (c) 303/260-8221

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