



Update 6/2026

## NEW MEXICO ANNUAL CONFERENCE OF THE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH SAFER SANCTUARIES GUIDELINES

**It is our calling and our mandate to insure safer 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

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

- ❖ The Guidelines are to be used at conference and district events and ministries. This is the minimum standard for best practices, and churches are encouraged to meet them. If additional protection (i.e., cameras, additional adults, etc.) are available, additional protection should be utilized in addition to this policy.
- ❖ The Guidelines are for reference and resources for local churches, as written. Local churches must develop, update and implement a Safer Sanctuaries policy, specific to the local church, at each yearly Charge/Church Conference—see section VI of this Guidelines.
- ❖ These Safer Sanctuaries Guidelines are 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 on the New Mexico Child and Youth Families department website, [cyfd.org](http://cyfd.org). and the Texas Department of Family and Protective Services website <https://www.dfps.texas.gov> .

**Abuse** means harm or threatened harm to the health or welfare of an individual by anyone. Abuse may include, but is not limited to, non-accidental physical or mental injury; sexual abuse; sexual exploitation or mistreatment; sexual harassment; sexual contact or molestation; the dissemination, exhibition, or display of sexually explicit material; neglect; and financial abuse or exploitation.

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

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

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

**Elder person** is a person of advanced years.

<https://aging.nm.gov/protecting-adults>

[https://www.dfps.texas.gov/Protect\\_Texas\\_Adults/who-adult-protective-services-protects/](https://www.dfps.texas.gov/Protect_Texas_Adults/who-adult-protective-services-protects/)

**Financial Abuse/Exploitation** means when another person (caretaker, relative, acquaintance) has such control over economic resources, which diminishes the victim/vulnerable persons capacity to support themselves, resulting in dependence on the perpetrator.

**Leader** means anyone solely responsible for supervising and overseeing a 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, or 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 the 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 photography, filming, or 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 paid employee or volunteer of the Conference, District, local church or ministry.

**Safer Sanctuaries Trainer** means a person is a Certified Local Church Trainer, after participating in a certification class. This person is then expected to hold a minimum of one Basic Safer Sanctuaries class for their local church every year.

**Volunteer** means a person who participates as a leader or assists a leader in activities

**Vulnerable adult** means an adult who has one or more mental, physical, or emotional impairments that render the person incapable of self-care or independent living without assistance, whether the impairment is temporary or permanent.

### **Statement of Guidelines**

Abuse of a child, youth, vulnerable adult, volunteer, and/or staff person is prohibited in any conference, district, or local church event, ministry or facility.

- A. 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. It is the responsibility of the event coordinator to ensure compliance with this policy.
  - ❖ It is especially 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.
- B. Mandated reporting Hotlines
  - New Mexico- 855/333-7233
    - Elder Abuse-866/654-3219
  - Texas- 800/799-7233
    - Elder Abuse-800/252-5400
  - Reporting abuse on Tribal Land must be reported to the Federal Authorities- 800/458-9858
- C. In writing, with the provided form and contact list.

Form link: <http://www.nmconfum.com/vital-congregations/safer-sanctuaries/>

1. Such reports of observed or suspected abuse must be reported to the District Superintendent, and the Conference Safer Sanctuaries Director in writing.

Contact phone numbers/email addresses as of this policy revision date:

Director of Safer Sanctuaries, Melissa Thacker, (505) 255-8786,  
[melissa@nmconfum.com](mailto:melissa@nmconfum.com)

District Superintendent, Albuquerque Rev. Ross Whiteaker, (325) 864-2265  
[ross@nmconfum.com](mailto:ross@nmconfum.com)

District Superintendent, El Paso-Rev. Dr. Pam Rowley, (575) 642-8559  
[prowley@nmconfum.com](mailto:prowley@nmconfum.com)

### **Implementation of Guidelines**

Current background check screening (every two years) and yearly training required for all part-time and full-time staff, and volunteers, regardless of position, as all people can work or encounter children, youth, and/or vulnerable adults

1. General: For this policy, paragraphs 2 and 3, directly below, apply to all people (volunteers 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 people who are employees of independent contractors who engage in events, such as bus drivers of contracted bus lines, bands, and the like, although requesting written confirmation of completion is highly recommended.

2. Background Investigations: ALL staff and volunteers must have background checks done for them. It is industry standard that background checks be completed at least every two (2) years. See paragraph 4 below for information regarding Protect My Ministries background checks.

3. Safer Sanctuaries Training is mandatory for ALL staff and volunteers. Training will be completed annually. Proof of completion will be kept by the church, as well as the trainee and the Certified Local Church Trainer will send the date of training and list of names who were trained, with full attendance, to Melissa Thacker, [melissa@nmconfum.com](mailto:melissa@nmconfum.com) There are currently several ways to complete training. See paragraph 4 below, for information regarding training offered and certificates.

- a. Online Protect My Ministry Basic class approved by the NMC may be allowed **one time**. All subsequent training should be completed in person or by Zoom via training provided by the NMC.

4. The NMC partners with Protect My Ministry to offer discounted background checks and quick, online training for all churches in the New Mexico Annual Conference. Churches can choose between two options: one with no annual fee and another with a \$150 yearly fee, depending on their needs. Details about pricing, included services, and helpful resources are available on the conference website at <http://www.nmconfum.com/vital-congregations/safer-sanctuaries/>. For questions, please contact the NMC Director of Safer Sanctuaries.

If your church has opted not to use Protect My Ministry, your church must have a process that complies with the Safer Sanctuaries Guidelines of the New Mexico Annual Conference.

- a. NMC has a substantial number of CLMs and others that have taken a “Train the Trainer” course (see paragraph 5 for info) and can provide in-person or online Safer Sanctuaries Training, with a signed certification of completion provided. All Certified Local Church Safer Sanctuaries Trainers must send a copy of their certificates to the NMC Director of Safer Sanctuaries.
- b. You may use any other means for obtaining a background check.

5. Certification for Local Church Safer Sanctuaries Basic Class Trainers can be obtained through training offered by NM Conference Trustees.

- a. The Local Church Safer Sanctuaries Basic Class Certification for trainers is a three-hour class with a \$25 fee due at registration.
- b. Classes will be offered as needed
- c. Trainers maintain their certificate by providing a yearly Safer Sanctuaries class. Trainers will keep their certification with yearly documentation of date of training and persons who received training sent to the NMC Director of Safer Sanctuaries.
- d. Trainer training will be offered as needed, along with refresher/update classes by Deb and Hank Humiston and Kathy Jewell

Discipleship Ministries at <https://www.umcdiscipleship.org/equipping-leaders/safe-sanctuaries> has a variety of Safer Sanctuaries 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 Safer Sanctuaries Director at the NM Annual Conference.

### **Responsible Non-Related, Non-Cohabiting Adult Supervision**

1. This Guideline requires 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, non-cohabiting adults be present at all conference and/or district events and ministries involving children or vulnerable adults.**

2. 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).

3. Day Care/Preschool programs housed on church campus, privately run or church-affiliated, will follow all guidelines for non-related, non-cohabitating Adult Supervision.

Licensed childcare, preschool and schools housed in churches, whether privately or church-run, must comply with state mandated licensing requirements for adult to child ratios. They are exempt from the ratios listed below.

4. Adult/child ratios:
  - 0-12 months, 2 adults-8 kids (1:4)
  - 1-3 years, 2 adults-12 kids (1:6)
  - 3-5 years, 2 adults, 20 kids (1:10)
  - School Age, 2 adults, 24 kids (1:12)

#### **Overnight Accommodations** - events requiring overnight accommodations

1. When staying in a camp or hotel setting, leaders shall sleep in separate rooms 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.
2. Recognizing accommodation may be restrictive in some cases, one leader is adequate, no one leader shall be alone with any one child.

#### **Supervision for nursery/childcare at Conference and District events**

1. There shall be a minimum of two (2) non-related, non-cohabitating adult childcare providers per room.
2. We recommend that whenever possible, state childcare minimum standards should be followed, particularly concerning the number of childcare providers to child ratio.
3. Adult/child ratios, also, a Safer Sanctuaries Supervisor
  - 0-12 months, 2 adults-8 kids (1:4)
  - 1-3 years, 2 adults-12 kids (1:6)
  - 3-5 years, 2 adults, 20 kids (1:10)
  - School Age, 2 adults, 24 kids (1:12)

#### **Supervision of children and youth, and vulnerable people at Conference and District events**

1. Whenever reasonable, the "Two non-related, non-cohabitating Adult Rule" will require that no fewer than two non-related, non-cohabitating adults always be present during any church-sponsored program, event or ministry involving children, youth, or vulnerable persons. Situations may arise when the "Two non-related, non-cohabitating Adult Rule" is not feasible. At NO time will an adult be one-on-one with a child in an isolated or closed situation.

2. 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.
3. There will be a designated Safer Sanctuaries contact person at any Conference or District event where vulnerable individuals are present. Contact information for this person will be posted or otherwise made available.

### **Local Church Mandate**

Each local church is required to adopt a Safer Sanctuaries Policy for their church updated yearly at the Church/Charge Conference. The Safer Sanctuaries Policy must be filed with the District Superintendent, and Conference Director of Safer Sanctuaries. An annual review of policy will be submitted to the Local Church Charge/Church Conference.

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

1. Educate the congregation on the definitions of abuse
2. Provide a copy of the Safer Sanctuaries Policy in written form to the entire Congregation.
  - a. posted in easy-to-locate areas in classrooms and other rooms used by vulnerable individuals.
  - b. 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" "Non-Cohabiting" Rule
5. An annual Safer Sanctuaries training course for all volunteers and paid staff
6. All events involving children must have at least two non-related, non-cohabiting adults in a supervisory role
7. All windows uncovered in all rooms, doors open, and all areas in sweeping view (hallways, shared areas, stairwells, playground, etc.)
8. A "sign-in/sign-out" procedure implemented for nursery, preschool, and elementary-age children
  - a. Signed in/out by a parent or legal guardian.
9. Respond to and report allegations of abuse according to the state/federal law (See page 3, Statement of Guidelines)

### **Other recommendations for inclusion in Local Church Policies**

1. Use open-door for any counseling session.
  - Know when to refer to a counseling agency at any abuse disclosed.
2. Provide advanced written documentation notice to parents for off-campus activities, trips & retreats. A signed release form must accompany each child/youth, and provide proper supervision as outlined in Section IV
3. Maintain and be familiar with adequate insurance for the scope of local church's ministries, e.g., transportation, camps, and on-site.

4. Maintain and update policy for church websites, and social media platforms.
5. Maintain and update transportation rules/guidelines
  - two non-related people/non cohabitating in any vehicle
6. Implement a “Participation Covenant” for all participants and leaders.
7. Ensure that first aid/CPR trained personnel are always available, with ready access to adequate equipment.
8. Provide parents, family, staff, and volunteers Safer Sanctuaries training annually.
9. Screen-Supervise-Respond- Report: sections in each Local Church Safer Sanctuaries Policy

**Discipleship Ministries Resources:**

- Participation Covenant
- Examples of Local Church Policy
- Safer Sanctuaries – Book
- Safer Sanctuaries Training resource videos and online Safer Sanctuaries Companion Guide.
- Spanish Translation

**Additional information Contact people through Discipleship Ministries:**

Chris Wilterdink  
Director, Young People’s Ministries  
cwilterdink@umcdiscipleship.org  
877/899-2780 ext. 7058  
(c) 303/260-8221

**Adopted by the New Mexico Annual Conference/NM Conference Trustees, June 2022**  
**Updated June 2024**  
**Updated June 2026**